



THE DALTON FAMILY SAGA

# *The Lady of Dencotte House*



JENNY FRAME

# **The Dalton Family Saga:**

## **Book Two: The Lady of Dencotte House**

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Thanks to my Beta reader AC. Your help and hard work has been invaluable.

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For my partner Lou. Your help, love and encouragement are my inspiration.

**Ambleton - January 1951**

Ada Bentley rushed, as fast as her stocky body would allow, down the garden path to the shabby cottage she shared with her husband Jim.

"Jim? Jim!" She shouted.

She went the back door of the cottage, and entered the kitchen to find her husband Jim slouched in an armchair by the fire. The tall, silver haired, man was lightly snoring, his head resting in his hand.

Ada marched over and shook her husband by the shoulder.

"Wake up you drunken old fool!"

"What are doing woman! Leave me to sleep! Unless you've worked out how we're going to pay the rent this month." He grumbled.

"I think you'll want to hear this Jim. It's about Beth."

Beth Bentley was the daughter of Jim's late brother, Edward. At his brother's funeral they had offered the young girl a place to live, thinking she would arrive with an inheritance for the couple to manage.

When they found out that such an inheritance didn't exist, they were furious but were stuck with her and so they made Beth earn her keep in more ways than one.

The girl took on a cleaning job with the at the village rectory and well as being responsible for all the household tasks at the cottage, and the sewing work that Ada took in, leaving her Aunt and Uncle to indulge in drink and idleness.

The girl's life was miserable and she dreamed of the day she could get away and make her own life.

With the help of the church rector, she had saved enough to leave for London and start a new life.

One morning, at the end of last October, Beth Bentley had left the cottage, and never looked back. Her Aunt and Uncle had never heard of her since.

"What? Does she want to come home with her tail between her legs? Ungrateful little bitch!" Jim asked angrily.

"No. When I was in the post office I overheard Mrs Carter talking to Miss Johnston. I couldn't hear every word but I heard the gist of it. Mrs Carter was telling her about young Elizabeth Bentley, who used to live in the village, marrying a Lord Dalton. She said he owned a great estate in the North Country and how shocking it was. I don't know why they thought it was shocking but do you know what this means? We're related to aristocracy, rich aristocracy!" She exclaimed.

Jim's mouth hung open in shock. He jumped up and grabbed his wife by the shoulders. "Oh my god! Our prayers are answered!" The husband and wife twirled round the room in delight.

"How are we going to get what's owed us Jim? Not only does she owe us for taking her in but she's family, your brother, God rest his soul, would want her to look after his family."

"Your quite right my dear! He would. I think first of all we need to find out all we can about this Dalton family before we make our move. Don't worry Ada. We will get what we are due." Jim said coldly.

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Beth Bentley sat at her desk, busily going through her paperwork. It had been a week since she and Alex had spent the Christmas holidays at the Dencotte estate.

A week since Alex had proposed marriage in the garden with moonlight overhead and snow falling around them.

Since then she had been on cloud nine enjoying the rest of the Christmas break, taking romantic walks and sharing stolen kisses with her intended Lady Alexandria Dalton, better known to all who knew her as Lord Alex Dalton.

Beth had come to London looking to start a new life, after her father's early death and the miserable time she had living with her Aunt Ada and Uncle Jim in Ambelton.

Beth became Alex's secretary and even though there was an instant attraction it was very hard for them both to admit their feelings, but with the help of Alex's good friends Poni and Lotty Woodward, they got through it and since then were devoted to each other, with Alex proposing on Christmas Eve.

This was their first week back after Christmas, and the work had piled up over the holidays. They had been working hard catching up, but Alex had left at lunch time to attend to some business at the bank, promising to pick her fiancé up at finishing time.

The phone rang on Beth's desk. "Good Afternoon, Dalton Foundation. How can I help you?"

"Hello, my dear. How does it feel to be back at the coal face?"

Beth smiled at the sound of her best friend voice.

"Hello Lotty! Good to hear from you. It's alright, I enjoy my work but I do miss the peace and quiet of Dencotte.

"Who wouldn't? But before long you'll be mistress of all you survey there." Lotty took great joy in her young friend's happiness.

"I know! Can you believe it? I'm so happy!"

"I can hear that, you deserve it. Now to more serious matters, we need a planning meeting." Lotty said seriously.

"Planning? Whatever for?" Beth said puzzled.

"The wedding!"

"Oh, but what's to plan? We've decided on the date, 6 weeks time at Dencotte with our good friends, the staff and some of our friends from the Alley Cat. Alex has already spoken to the Rector at the church and he's agreed to give perform the ceremony. Alex said not to worry. What else is there?"

"Oh my goodness! I do have a lot to teach you. There's the reception, all the food, your dress, my dress since you asked me to be bridesmaid. You need to pick a couture designer for not only your wedding clothing but you need a full wardrobe of clothes for the season and to be suitable for your honeymoon. Need I go on? Don't listen to anything Alex or my Poni might tell you."

Beth's heart began to pound uncontrollably. "I had no idea." panic was beginning to set in.

"The food! I never thought, I suppose I thought Alex would get Mrs Mcklusey to organise the reception."

"No my dear. Your housekeeper needs instruction and if you left it up to Alex we'd be having champagne and fish paste sandwiches! But don't worry, we'll sort it out. That's why we need a planning meeting." The older woman reassured her.

"I never considered that when I said yes to becoming Alex's wife, I was also agreeing to become mistress of her household as well. How am I going to learn? Most women marrying into Alex's sort of family would have been brought up in the same so would know everything that was expected of them. I wasn't, I'm the middle class daughter of a Professor. What am I going to do? How do I handle servants, how do I organise the house? I don't want to let Alex down!" Beth panicked.

"We'll sort it out, calm down. Come over to Grosvenor Street on Friday night. We'll have a nice dinner then pack our loving partners off to the billiard room so we can sort things out. We don't have much time but I promise we will make this a special day for you."

"Thank you Lotty. I don't know what I'd without your friendship."

"Not at all. Shall we say Friday at half past seven?"

"We'll look forward to it. Goodbye then."

Beth was overwhelmed. There was more to being the Lady of Dencotte than she first thought.

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Lord Dalton jumped out her car and took two steps at a time as she bounced up the stairs of the office building, whistling to herself. Her business of this afternoon was successful and she'd never been happier since her girl had agreed to be her wife.

She quietly entered the office door to see Beth with her nose in a pile of papers.

"Knock knock!" announced Alex.

Beth looked up to see the tall, dark, imposing blue eyed figure that had stolen her heart.

"Alex!" She jumped up and threw herself into her beloved's arms.

The older woman bent down and gave her Fiancé a light kiss which soon deepened and became more passionate as Alex teased the girl's lips with her tongue, gently seeking entrance into her mouth. Alex finally pulled away, her teeth still grasping onto Beth's upper lip and slowly letting go.

"Hmm; I missed you little bit."

"You too darling." Beth said sweetly then all of a sudden she smacked Alex on the arm.

"Argh! What was that for?" She pouted.

"You My Lord did not tell me all the arrangements that would have to be done for our wedding, and stop pouting it won't get you out of trouble with me."

Alex wandered over and sat on the edge of Beth's desk and lit a cigarette. She looked over at Beth, her hands on her hips in mock rage.

Alex continued to pout, but secretly was smiling inside at the change in the young girl. Since she had met Beth she had blossomed, with her love and encouragement, in both confidence and her place in the world.

"What? There's plenty of time." Alex asked puzzled.

"Six weeks Alex. There's the service, the reception, my dress, your suit, need I go on?" Beth was exasperated now.

Alex smiled confidently. "Sweetheart that is nothing that money can't solve."

"You're impossible! Do you think money can solve everything?"

Alex stood. "I would say so sweetheart, apart from matters of life and death, and sometimes even then. You throw enough money at something or somebody and you always get what you want, and of course," Alex's face became serious, and her eyes took on the look of a predator. She stalked over to Beth, taking her face in her hands and gave her that look like she wanted to devour the girl whole. The one that made Beth turn to mush and said. "I am Lord Alex Dalton, and I always get what I want." The older woman began to pepper small kisses and bites on her neck.

"Hmm! Alex." The girl moaned.

Then just as quickly Alex pulled away from her and flashed a toothy grin.

"See? I told you." She said feeling very smug.

"You, My Lord are very cocky!" Beth prodded her playfully in the chest.

"With good reason, now why don't we talk about this tonight over dinner? I promise we will get everything sorted out alright?" Alex stroked her face reassuringly.

"Right, I'll just put these papers away and we can get on our way."

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Beth was going to be spending the evening at Alex's flat, cooking dinner. Alex finished her plate, brimming with homemade steak and ale pie, potatoes and other vegetables

"I must say! That was simply heavenly. You know I'd much rather eat this sort of food than dine in fancy restaurants sweetheart." Alex said happily.

"Well I'm glad you approve of my cooking so much. Would you like dessert now or rest a little?"

"Em? Rest I think. I'm stuffed."

"Alright I'll get these things cleaned up, why don't you go and get the drinks set out." Beth said.

"Yes ma'am!" Alex exclaimed.

The young blonde laughed. "Off you go my lord."

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Beth came through to the drawing room with coffee for them both. Alex was standing at the fireplace, enjoying a cigar and brandy.

"I poured you a small brandy sweetheart."

"Thanks darling." said Beth. She put down the coffee and took her seat on the comfortable sofa. The smell of cigar smoke wafted over, Beth always found the aroma comforting.

She sat back and enjoyed the warming effect of the brandy.

"Sweetheart, before we talk about our plans for the wedding, I've been thinking about what you said earlier today, about me not telling you how much we had to get done. Well I think I haven't been doing what I should to help you understand this new life you're heading into. Not only the wedding,

but the running of the estate, and the duties and responsibilities of the Master and Mistress of the estate. I've grown up in this world and I think I've taken for granted that you'll understand, I'll try explaining as best I can but I think you should have a talk with Mrs Mcklusey, she'll give you a very good understanding of the workings of the house, servants and what not." Alex stubbed out her cigar and came to join Beth on the couch, lifting her arm to encourage the girl to cuddle into her side.

"I have to say it is a quite overwhelming darling but I want to learn. I want to do as good a job as I can in helping you with the estate. Lotty has asked us to dinner on Friday. She wants to help us plan the wedding. I'll ask her advice as well."

*Lotty does run a large establishment. She should be able to help me. I don't want to be a disappointment to Alex!*

"I will certainly be glad of your help. There are certain area's in the running of the house and village that I have let slip over the years, tasks that usually the Mistress of the house would take care of.

The best way I can describe it is to think of the estate and the village as a large company. The Master and Mistress are at the head of the board, and the house servants, estate staff, villagers and people of the county are the workers. We all depend on each other for our existence. An organism each is playing its part. One cannot survive without the other. Although there are a lot of things I don't agree with about the class system, it is the way it is at the moment and we have to get on with it. Those of us who run good and fair estates are not, as some would paint us, rich and living off the labour of others, but guardian's taking care of the land until it is time to pass it on to the next generation.

The responsibility of the well being and the livelihoods of the people that work on the estate, village and county rest on my shoulders and I take that responsibility very seriously. It's my life's work and has been my family's life's work for two hundred years."

Beth listened on in awe. "You make it sound so romantic darling."

Alex smiled. "Perhaps not romantic sweetheart, but I do get very defensive of our life in the country. City people think my servants are put upon slaves, waiting on me hand and foot while I lounge about being fed grapes by parlour maids! The staff positions are very respectable work and highly sought after in the local community. We pay a very fair wage."

Beth leaned over kissed Alex sweetly on the lips.

"I believe you darling. Perhaps Lotty can give me some advice on handling staff. That is the area normally controlled by the lady of the house, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is little bit. I will be glad of your help, and I hope when we are married we will spend more time down there than I have. I was lonely there on my own but now I have you, it will be the happiest place on earth." The tall woman kissed her fiancé on the head.



"There are of course more things to the estate than what I've told you so far. There are the flower shows, village fates, the farms, and housing for the workers, care of the animals, forestry, and the hunting seasons. I could go on but really it was meant to be a full time job until my father started the foundation. My steward Jones, Mrs Mcklusey and Foster do more than they should but I hope to do more now."

Beth turned to face Alex. Her heart was pounding in her chest at the enormity of the task ahead.

"Darling, I can't say I'm not overwhelmed at what is going to be my new life, but I'm also looking forward to a wonderful challenge and to looking after you My Lord." She closed the distance between them and began a kiss that communicated all of her love. Alex moaned and quickly lifted her in one motion that brought Beth onto her lap. They had kept their activities strictly to kissing and touching. Alex had never gone so long without sex in her life but was determined to do things right with the woman that was to be her wife.

She decided it was time to pull back, but it was so hard to do.

"Hmm! Okay dokey little bit. Time to cool down." The two women rested their foreheads together.

"Darling, I can't wait till were married and don't have to stop. I've felt like this before, I don't know, I just need you!" She began attacking Alex's mouth again.

Alex pulled away quickly. "Oh no, you don't! I'm patient little bit but I can only take so much. I promise you I'm looking forward to our wedding night more than anything in the world. In fact once were in my bedroom I may never let you out. Now! No more putting me off our planning meeting. Can you get us more coffee and I'll get some things I picked up this afternoon?" Alex asked.

"Of course darling."

"Thank you, sweetheart. I'll be right back."

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Beth sat and watched Alex walk back from the bedroom with a large brown envelope. She placed it on the coffee table and sat down next to Beth again.

"Now let's do some planning shall we? First of all, the ceremony. Now I wrote to the Rector and he is happy to give us a ceremony and blessing at Dencotte. He did the same for Poni and Lotty. I know it won't be legal but, in our hearts and the eyes of God and our friends, we will be married."

"Of course we will darling. How did you get the vicar to agree? Surely it goes against everything he believes?" Beth asked.

"Well, he's not as stuffy as some and he's watched me grow up. I suppose he accepts I am who I am. And of course the church and the Rectors living are within the gift of the Countess. I own his house and his church. Dencotte church is in the best condition in the country! It has the best of everything, owing to the patronage of the Dalton family. Believe me; it's not in his interests to displease me. She smiled with a cheeky look on her face.

"I suppose you are right about money moving mountains then?"

"Yes indeed. Now speaking of money, when we go to the Woodward's on Friday you'll be organising shopping trips for your wedding dress and as Lady Dalton, you'll need to have a whole wardrobe of clothes made for the upcoming season and for the honeymoon. You won't be going to Harrods's this time; Lotty will help you pick a couture designer. For most of the shops in London, I will have an account set up with them, and the bills get sent to me for settlement, but I may not have with some of the ladies shops you will want to frequent, so if that's the case please set up accounts in my name at any shop you want or if you wish use cash."

Alex picked up the brown envelope she had brought from the bedroom.

"When I was away from the office this afternoon, I was at my bank setting up a bank book and a chequebook for you as my wife. Use your chequebook for anything you want or go into the bank and take money out of the account. I have given you full access to my general account, I do have a lot of money in saving and investment accounts but you will always find enough, even for a large purchase in this account." Alex said, handing Beth the banking book and cheques.

"B...but Alex...." Beth stammered nervously.

"Now before you start, you are going to be my wife. That means I look after you and take care of you, and in return you do the same for me in other ways. Did your father not do that for your mother?"

"Yes....bu..."

"Well then, there you go. Everything that I have is half yours now. You never have to think about money again. We've discussed this issue before and I've made it quite clear that I will brook no argument." Alex gave Beth that commanding stare that would make the young girl do anything to please her lord. Beth nodded; it seemed futile to argue about money with her beloved.

"I also set up an appointment with my lawyer for us to organise changing my will to benefit you instead of the Woodward's and to set the wheels in motion to change your name to Dalton. Does that suit?"

"Of course Alex. Whatever you think best. I can't wait to be Elizabeth Dalton."

"Lady Elizabeth Dalton." Alex corrected.

"I know I can't legally share my title with you but to our friends, our staff and everyone that counts you will be her Ladyship. Now is that enough planning to satisfy you so far?"

"Yes, well done!" Beth beamed.

"I'm quite sure Lotty and yourself can enjoy organising the rest. Now we better get you home before Agnes locks up for the night."

Alex pulled Beth to her feet.

"Of course My Lord, I do love you so much." Beth gushed.

"And I you little bit. Come now."

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The next few days went fairly quietly. Alex and Beth had been working hard but had finally caught up with all the work that had piled up over Christmas.

Friday night found them dining at the Woodward's, for the much needed wedding meeting. They all sat in the drawing room, Lotty notepad in hand. Footmen and parlour maids milled around filling glasses and clearing away.

"Can we bring this meeting to order?" announced Lotty.

"Watch out Alex, she means business! I doubt you'll have much say in anything from here on out." Poni whispered to Alex.

"Poni Woodward! I heard that! If you wish me to be less organised then I shall leave the running of the house to you this week and by Monday morning Mrs Durant will be handing in her notice, along with the other staff. You couldn't organise a cake stall at a church fete!" Lotty chastised.

Alex laughed at her friend's predicament. Poni gave her a sharp look before standing and making her way over to her wife's chair.

She took her wife's hand, which was purposely looking in the other direction in mock disgust, and gave light kisses to her hand saying.

"I do apologise my honey pie. You know this house would fall apart without your amazing leadership skills."

"Alright you buffoon! Sit down and let's get started." Poni sat down suitably chastised.

"So, where were we? Ah yes. I think the first thing is the ceremony. Alex, have you organised the vicar?"

"Yes Ma'am!" Alex shouted, sitting to attention.

Alex and Poni laughed but Alex soon received a swat to the arm from Beth.

"Darling, behave! Lotty is trying to help us here."

"Aww! That hurt you know!"

"I know, now behave." Beth scolded.

"Thank you Beth. Now if the vicar is organised, then where will the ceremony take place?" Lotty asked.

"Oh Alex, if it was at a better time of year, I would have loved it to take place in the Japanese garden, It's my favourite place and it was your mother's, it seems right." Beth said.

"That would have been magical, sweetheart."

"Why does it have to be a dream Alex?" Poni wondered. "Lots of people have winter weddings. As long as it's a fine day, does it really matter if it's cold? Everyone can wrap up well and we can have the ballroom all set up, as a backup plan, if on the day it's wet."

"What a wonderful idea Poni! I could kiss you!" exclaimed Beth.

"Don't do that Beth; I don't want a black eye from her Lordship over there!" Poni joked.

"What do you think sweetheart? Lotty?" The young women asked.

"I say it's a fine idea. Alex?" Lotty asked.

"I think it will be wonderful. I'll send word to Mrs Mcklusey to set the wheels in motion."

Beth grabbed Alex's hand. "Thank you darling it will be perfect. I know it."

Lotty checked down her list and said. "Now that just leaves clothes, decorations and food. I think we can handle that on our own. Why don't you two go and play with the billiard balls?" Lotty looked pointedly at Alex and Poni smirking.

Glad of the opportunity to get out of talk of dresses and food, Lotty and Beth's partner's jumped up and set off for the door.

"If you insist my honey pie." said Poni as they excited.

Alex bent over and kissed Beth tenderly. Have fun little bit." She whispered.

Lotty looked at Beth and said."Now we can get down to the real business!" They both laughed.

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Traver's, Poni's butler poured out the brandy in the billiard room, as Alex set up the table. The older man was portly, but as smart as a new pin.

Alex and both taken off their jackets are down to their waistcoats.

Traver's brought round the cigar box. "Master a cigar?"

"Thank you Traver's" Said Poni taking one.

"M'lord?" He then offered the box to Alex.

"Thank you Traver's. How is your young niece getting on at Lady Edgerton's place?"

"Very well M'lord. She's moved up from kitchen maid to house maid now, it's a very good position for a girl her age. We're very proud of her. The letter of recommendation from the Master really helped her." Traver's beamed with pride.

"I'm glad to hear it. Please give your family my regards." Alex said politely.

"I will M'lord. Will that be all Master?" Traver's asked turning to Poni.

"Yes we'll be fine. You can start the servant's dinner now."

"I will master, I'll just check the ladies are settled first."

He inclined his head briefly and left the room.

Alex offered her friend the lighter. Poni inhaled her first puff and blew out slowly.

"Thank God, I thought we'd never get through here and get a smoke. You break." She told Alex.

"It'll be frills this and frills that and 'oh isn't that just the sweetest piece of lace you've ever seen!" Said Alex, as she took her shot. "I mean how sweet can one piece of lace be?"

"Your right my friend but then after all their talking and shopping they do come out looking like knockout's." Poni potted her shot.

"And remember they'll be buying honeymoon clothes for your girl. Silky soft night things? Hmmm, I love it when Lotty does that type of shopping." She said dreamily.

Alex downed her last gulp of whiskey and said. "I don't even want to hear that kind of talk, I'm going to explode as it is! I'm sure I've lost some brain cells already."

"Tough waiting? I know what that's like old man." She watched on as Alex potted a red then a coloured ball.

"I remember that only too well. We both wanted to wait, but we came so close this one time, it was about two weeks to the wedding, Lotty was stressed to distraction over all the details and apparently I asked one stupid question too many, she snapped, shouted at me and we had one almighty argument. I stomped off angrily, looked back over my shoulder at her, our eyes connected and suddenly I had her up against the wall. The anger was sexual frustration; anyway it was so passionate, pulling at each other's clothes. As you know my mother lived here in those days, I was just too about to conquer new territory as it were, when mother's voice came from the drawing room. *'Poni! Poni! I can't get the correct station on the wireless. Poni! Can you hear me?'*

Alex belly laughed at her friend's story.

"Keep laughing my lord, you have five more weeks of abstinence ahead of you."

That shut up Alex immediately. "You're right, it's torture. What makes it worse is we can't seem to get enough of each other, the kissing, the touches, the sitting in my lap she does at every opportunity. Torture I tell you!" Alex moaned.

"So have you sorted out the honeymoon?" Poni asked changing the subject.

"Yes." Alex poured herself another whiskey and puffed on her cigar.

"I wasn't sure whether to go abroad or up to the house in Scotland, but then I thought we'll be up in Scotland for the Grouse season in August anyway so she'll see it then. She hasn't been out of the country before so I didn't want to go too far this time, so I booked us on the Queen Elizabeth bound for New York. We'll get lots of time together on the way out then I'm sure she'll love the sightseeing and the shopping around New York. What do you think?" Alex asked, hoping she had made the right choice.

"Fantastic thought old friend. The ship is pure luxury, I'm sure she'll love it."

"That reminds me. I want to take a full month off from the office after the wedding, for the honeymoon and to see Beth settled into her role at Dencotte. I've asked Thomas Cooper and his assistant, who manage the foundation building to take over from me while I am away. I have every confidence in them, but I thought maybe you could look in a few times a week to make sure the foundation hasn't collapsed around our ears when I get back."

"No trouble at all. I'll stop in often check the books, make sure everything's well."

"Perhaps if this works out, I might be able to spend more time, away from the office with my wife at Dencotte. I would get in more staff obviously but it's my intention to spend more time in the country." Alex said.

"Excellent idea. You deserve this Alex. Now you've found her, enjoy every minute of your time together." Poni slapped her friend on her back.

"I will Poni, don't worry. I will." Alex resolved.

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"So that's clothes and food ticked off the list. We'll go to the designers on Monday." Said Lotty, going through her list.

"Yes Monday's fine, Alex wanted me not to work right up to the wedding, but I think it'll be better just to take day's off here and there, because there'll come a point where there's no more we can do. We'll both be off the week before though. I hope they have enough time to make everything." said Beth.

"Ideally you should've had more time, but money will buy you a rush job, now will you remember and telephone Mrs Mcklusey about the wedding food?"

"Yes. I'm nervous though."

"Why?" asked Lotty, puzzled.

"Well, one minute I'm just a guest at the house the next I'm telephoning giving her instruction on how to run it." Beth said worriedly.

"Beth it's your house now. You are going to be its mistress. Mrs Mcklusey will think you're a godsend. She has been doing far too much over the years, she'll be very glad of your input. Which reminds me." Lotty stood and walked over to a side cabinet and got a book from the drawer.

"You wanted some guidance on her to run a large home and staff? This should help." she handed over the book.

Beth looked the cover and smiled '*Mrs Beaton's Book of Household Management*.' "I've heard of her but I thought it was just recipe books she published?"

"My dear read the first paragraph in the chapter titled "The Mistress", and you'll see she will guide you well." Lotty said.

Beth flicked to the correct page and read aloud.

*"Strength, and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household; and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."—Proverbs, xxxi. 25–28.*

*AS WITH THE COMMANDER OF AN ARMY, or the leader of any enterprise, so is it with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment; and just in proportion as she performs her duties intelligently and thoroughly, so will her domestics follow in her path. Of all those acquirements, which more particularly belong to the feminine character, there are none which take a higher rank, in our estimation, than such as enter into a knowledge of household duties; for on these are perpetually dependent the happiness, comfort, and well-being of a family. In this opinion we are borne out by the author of "The Vicar of Wakefield," who says: "The modest virgin, the prudent wife, and the careful matron, are much more serviceable in life than petticoated philosophers, blustering heroines, or virago queens. She who makes her husband and her children happy, who reclaims the one from vice and trains up the other to virtue, is a much greater character than ladies described in romances, whose whole occupation is to murder mankind with shafts from their quiver, or their eyes."*

"Oh my, this is going to be very different from keeping house for my father!" Said Beth worried at the enormity of the task.

"You'll have lots of help though. Read the first paragraph in the housekeeper section."

*' AS SECOND IN COMMAND IN THE HOUSE, except in large establishments, where there is a house steward, the housekeeper must consider herself as the immediate representative of her mistress, and bring, to the management of the household, all those qualities of honesty, industry, and vigilance, in the same degree as if she were at the head of her own family. Constantly on the watch to detect any wrong-doing on the part of any of the domestics, she will overlook all that goes on in the house, and will see that every department is thoroughly attended to, and that the servants are comfortable, at the same time that their various duties are properly performed.*

*Cleanliness, punctuality, order, and method, are essentials in the character of a good housekeeper. Without the first, no household can be said to be well managed. The second is equally all-important; for those who are under the housekeeper will take their "cue" from her; and in the same proportion as punctuality governs her movements, so will it theirs. Order, again, is indispensable; for by it we wish to be understood that "there should be a place for everything, and everything in its*



*place. "Method, too, is most necessary; for when the work is properly contrived, and each part arranged in regular succession, it will be done more quickly and more effectually.'*

"She's quite right; you're a commander of an army that takes care of the house. Read it all through, some things you'll discard because it's just old fashioned and not done anymore, but it'll give you an excellent overview of how a household is run." Lotty explained.

"It really is a different world; you would think I was marrying a King!"

"Well, a Countess isn't too far removed from that so you're nearly right." Lotty smiled at the look of bewilderment on the young girl's face.

"I always have a hard time reconciling Alex's position with the person I love. She's the most loving and down to earth person I know. Nothing like a Countess."

"Well that's why you are the very woman for the job; other's only see her title. So Monday morning we take our first steps to making you look like the wife of The Countess of Sheffield! Did she tell you her full title?" Lotty inquired.

"No, I didn't know there was anymore. You know she doesn't like to speak of such things."

"Well my dear, you are marrying the Countess of Sheffield and Baroness of Halwood. How's that for a mouthful!" She laughed.

"Baroness of Hallwood? Where does that come in?" Asked Beth astonished.

"A title and lands the family picked up through marriage along the way. They are a most interesting family, you should look them up in Burke's Peerage, and it has a whole section on them. Alex has one at Dencotte, but I'll give you a copy from our library to take with you, it's most illuminating."

"So where's Halwood?"

"It's an estate in the Scottish Highlands. Oh, I hear voices; those two buffoons must have missed our company. There goes our peace and quiet!" She said throwing her arms dramatically in the air.

Beth giggled.

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Later that evening Beth lay in Alex's bed, watching as the object of her desire stood getting ready for bed. At the weekend's she usually stayed over with Alex. Agnes, Beth's landlady was quite happy nothing inappropriate would take place. She trusted Alex not to dishonour Beth.

The tall woman lifted the covers and jumped in beside her fiancé, lifting her arm so that Beth could take her usual position on Alex's shoulder.

"Ah! Heaven. This is what I look forward to all week. Who would have thought I, Alex Dalton, would be so happy to come to bed and just cuddle." Alex pulled Beth tighter to her.

"Darling?"

"Hmm?" Alex was so comfortable; she was already starting to dose.

"You didn't tell me you were a Baroness." Beth asked quietly.

Alex opened one eye then quickly shut it again and said "It didn't come up."

"Alex Dalton! You're the most exasperating person I have ever met! I know you don't like to boast about your position but you constantly use three words when at least a few sentences are needed!"

Alex whipped round as quick as a flash and had Beth trapped underneath her. She grinned that cheesy grin she used as she looked down at Beth struggling to get loose.

"Alex stop messing about!"

"Do I have your full attention Miss Bentley?"

"Yes! What is it?"

"I am the 6th Countess of Sheffield and 4th Baroness of Halwood, better known as Lord Alex Dalton. Pleased to make your acquaintance Miss. Is that better?" She quirked her eyebrow up.

Beth giggled. "You are such a child Alex Dalton. I can't wait till I marry you." The older woman kissed the tip of her nose. Beth stroked along her beloved's muscular shoulders.

"Do you know what I love about you?"

"My charm and good looks?"

"Modest as always my lord. No apart from that. You can be so sweet and loving, wanting cuddles and to snuggle up together and the next you can turn on that commanding look that turns me to jelly and makes me want to do anything you say."

"What this one?" Alex said turning on said look.

"Oh no you don't, my lord. I'm not looking!" Beth squeezed her eyes closed tight. "You said only last week, you were determined we were waiting and if you look at me like that, we won't! Turn your brain back to cosy warm cuddling."

Alex's face softened, turning into an indulgent smile. "Okay sweetheart. She rolled over onto her back and beckoned Beth to join her.

"Cuddles? Come on sweetheart."

Beth snuggled into her side. "I just love you so much, sometimes I could burst." Beth said.

"I love you too little bit, so do you want to hear about the house in Scotland?"

The young woman nodded quickly.

"Well it's called Halwood Hall; it's a large estate, not as large as Greenacres of course. My family has always used it as a hunting lodge. There's great hunting in Scotland. The Woodward's and I go up for a break and for Poni and I to enjoy the hunting. The next season is grouse. We go up in August. You'll get to see it then. At least Lotty will have some company this time."

"Will you teach me how to fire a gun? I don't want to hunt or anything, I couldn't shoot a little animal but I'd like to say I've tried. Can I shoot a target or something?" Beth asked.

"If you wish, you can do anything you want, apart from leave me. If you tried I'd drag you back by the ears and tell you not to be so silly."

Beth laughed at the image.

"So did you get everything for the wedding sorted with Lotty?"

"Yes, I'll write down the instructions for Mrs Mcklusey but could you include them in with a letter from you? I wouldn't want to just write to her giving order's out of the blue, before were married."

"You do worry about the funniest things. Yes, we'll sort it out tomorrow and send it up."

"Thank you darling. Goodnight." She gave Alex a kiss.

"Night little bit. Sweet dreams." The older woman pulled her fiancé in as close she could.

*This is my happy place.* She thought.

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Mrs Mcklusey strode purposefully down the stone corridor, which connected the large kitchen and all the other downstairs rooms, a large bunch of keys hung around her waist, clinked together as she walked.

It was late just after the servants lunch, so all the indoors staff gathered round the large kitchen table. The outdoors workers ate separately.

As Mrs Mcklusey entered the kitchen, they all stood in respect.

In estates like Dencotte, the downstairs area of the house was as much ruled by class and rank as the upstairs. There was a strict hierarchy among the servants and everyone knew their place. The Butler ruled the roost, closely followed by the Housekeeper. Together they were the King and Queen of below stairs and although in other homes, these two positions were often held by characters who terrified the staff, at Dencotte, taking a lead from the family for two generations, the house was a happy one, and Mr Foster and Mrs Mcklusey took the tone of a stern father and other. They were still obeyed without question and a little feared, but it was a good place to work.

"As you were everyone, Laura and Thomas could you come with me to Mr Foster's office please?"

The two stood up straight away and followed the housekeeper without a word.

Ella, the very young, very thin scullery maid said. "Do you think they're in trouble?"

"Hush up girl! Of course not! Now come on, back to work. Those potatoes won't peel themselves!" said the rotund cook, Mrs. Read.

"Yes Mrs Read I'm going."

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Laura and Thomas entered Mr. Foster's office, followed by Mrs. Mcklusey. Foster was sitting behind his desk, writing in his account book. He looked up and said.

"Ah! Come in you two."

Mrs Mcklusey stood to his right.

"Mrs Mcklusey and I have had a letter from the Master, giving us instructions for the wedding in five weeks time. We wanted to speak to you separately from the others, as there are instructions for you two. Mrs Mcklusey would you like to start on the wedding arrangements?"

She nodded politely. "Thank you Mr Foster. We'll the Master sent instructions for the food etc..., that Miss Bentley and Mrs Woodward have worked out. The Master wants it made clear that the new Mistress be treated with kid gloves. She writes that Miss Bentley is nervous about running a household such as this and instructing servants so it is up to us as the senior members of the household to set the tone to the others. If she seems to be floundering with anything, help her best you can but with discretion."

"I'm sure I can speak for both Thomas and myself, we like the new Mistress very much and we'll do all we can to help her gain confidence here." Laura said.

"Yes, Mrs Mcluskey. I've never seen the Master happier. We will make sure she is comfortable." added Thomas.

"Thank you. I must emphasise, she may not get the same respect away from this house, but here she will always be the Countess of Sheffield, Lady Dalton and the Master's wife, and she will be treated that way by everyone on this estate and I'm sure the village. Make sure the rest of the staff fully understand this." Said Foster. The other's nodded in understanding.

"Now before we get into the details of the wedding, there will be a staff change. Laura you will now be the new Lady Dalton's Ladies maid. It's a promotion and great privilege." Foster smiled at Laura.

"Oh thank you Sir! I shall be very happy in my work."

"I understand the Mistress insisted it be you Laura, so I'm sure she shares that sentiment. Now the Master is taking Miss Bentley on the Queen Elizabeth, bound for New York, for their honeymoon. You will both of course have to accompany them." Foster explained.

"Oh my! Thomas we're going to New York!" Laura said excitedly.

"I'd love to take you to the empire state building Laura." said Thomas.

"Alright, calm down you two. You'll be there to work." Mrs Mcklusey said a bit sternly.

"Of course Mrs Mcklusey."

Seeing their faces fall a bit she smiled and said. "I'm sure the Master will let you have some time to yourselves. They'll be their honeymoon after all."

Everyone was again all smiles. Foster stood and said. "Well now we are all aware of our responsibilities, we should let the rest of the staff know. Mrs Mcklusey and Laura you can liaise Mrs Read on the food for the reception. Shall we?"

After they had announced the plans and Laura's change of role, the two took Mrs Read, the cook off to plan and order the food. The rest of the servants returned to their tasks.

Young Ella was left with Liz, another housemaid and Charlie, a footman. Ella looked over and observed her two older friends. Liz was a pretty girl with fiery red hair and green eyes, she had always been nice to Ella ever since she'd started, but then it was a nice house to work in. Her mother had warned her that being in service could be very tough, but she felt like she had another family here. Liz was occupied with some sewing since all her tasks were done.

Ella looked towards Charlie. He was a good looking young man with Sandy coloured hair, combed very smartly. She always seemed to drop things whenever he walked by, she had no idea why.

"Lizzie?" Ella said.

"Hmm?" Liz said without looking up.

"You know how the Master's getting wed."

"Yes." Lizzie looked up at the confused young woman.

"Well how can she get married to another girl when she's a woman herself, I mean I know she likes to dress like a gent, but she isn't?"

Charlie quickly looked up from his work. "Ella you be careful what you say!" He said angrily.

"It's alright Charlie, she's just a girl, she doesn't understand. Ella, our Master is different. She's strong and tough, but good and caring. I know the Late Lady Dalton told Mrs Mcklusey that she was certain the Master was born with the best attributes of both men and women in order to do the work with the Foundation and the estate. We all believe that and although it can't be legal, in their hearts and in the eyes of their friends and in all of the village and estate, they will be married. Do you understand now?"

Charlie added "The Master is a special kind of woman."

Ella smiled. "Yes she is. She's nice and kind, not like other any other gent I've heard of. She deserves to be happy! I understand now." Young Elle beamed.

"Well that's enough thinking for one day. You better get on before Mrs Read comes back and finds you doing nothing. Get going!"

Ella jumped up in panic. Charlie and Liz looked at each other and laughed.

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Beth stood in the parlour of her landlady, Agnes Baker. She was applying lipstick in the mirror above the fireplace.

"So where are you off too today?"

"To Hartnell, couture House; to get measured for my wedding dress and some clothes. Lotty recommended it, she goes to Christian Dior in Paris for her clothes, but she says we don't have enough time. I was quite thankful, maybe it'll be a bit more down to earth, I can't imagine going to Paris for clothes. I'm a bit nervous really." said Beth.

"Hartnell? That's who designed Princess Elizabeth's wedding dress. You're a lucky girl."

"Really? Oh no! I'm going stick out like a sore thumb; I thought it would be a simpler place. They're going to look down their noses at me!" She said in complete panic.

Agnes took her by the hand and sat her down.

"M'dear, calm down now. You go in that building; you hold your head high and are confident that this is your life now. Alex loves you more than anything in the world, you're going to be her wife, and she would give you anything you asked for. You could buy anything in their 1000 times over, just think about that if anyone shows you any attitude, and remember it may call itself a couture, but at the end of the day it's a shop, and the women that work there are shop girl's. You my dear never have to work a day in your life again, remember that and you'll be confident."

"I'll try to remember that, I will, but Alex just bulldozers her way through life, she's has always had respect, money and power, she expects everyone to go along with her way of thinking and not to question it, but for people that don't know us, it might look like am a kept bit on the side."

"Beth you know that's not the case the whole of London has been awash with gossip about Lady Dalton's new companion and I believe it was in the society pages the other day that Lady Dalton's companion was moving into Dencotte estate. I hardly think people would believe that she would move some sort of loose woman into her family home. The public aren't blind, they know that Alex is never going to marry a man, I presume the gossip columns have been very selective over what they print due to Alex's influence?" Agnes asked.

"Yes, she got word one of the papers that was going to run a sensationalist story, and phoned every editor in Fleet Street, threatened them to within an inch of their lives. Apparently she has a lot of connections with some of the newspaper owners and within government. She suggested cooperation between Government ministers and the papers would suddenly dry up. She doesn't want to hide, she just didn't want them running the story like juicy gossip so they agreed to take the line that she had a companion moving in with her and there will be a new Mistress of Dencotte, but everyone can read between the lines. It's as near a marriage announcement as you can get." Beth explained.

"Well I suggest you go into these places and act exactly as if you are Alex's wife, they will follow your lead, at least to your face, and your other half is too powerful to do otherwise."

Beth stood and hugged the older woman. "Thank you Agnes, that's just what I needed to hear. Will you stay at Dencotte for the wedding? You're the closest thing I have to a mother and I'd love you to help me get ready."

"I'd love to; I can't wait to see this wonderful estate you've told me so much about."

Beth heard a car horn from outside.

"Thank you Agnes. That'll be Lotty, I better go."

She grabbed her coat and rushed out the door.

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Lotty and Beth walked up the impressive stone stairs of Hartnell couture. Beth was surprised at how little the building looked like a design house. Either side of the massive black door were two large stone columns or the only indication of the business within was the brass plaque on the right hand side of the door, which read **House of Hartnell**.

Lotty rapped on the large door knocker. A tall doorman dressed in a smart suit with shining brass buttons.

"Can I help you Ma'am?" He said directly to Lotty, ignoring Beth completely.

*Am I invisible or something?* Beth wondered.

Lotty looked over at her young friend and nodded, encouraging her to speak.

Beth recalled Agnes's words. *'You walk in there with your head held high. You are to be the wife of Lord Alex Dalton. Remember it's just a shop, you could buy anything in it.'*

Beth took a deep breath and said. "Miss Elizabeth Bentley. I have an appointment at 10 o'clock."

The doorman looked her up and down once more then said. "If you would care to follow me."

He led them down a long corridor, past many doors. He finally stopped opened one of the doors and said. "If you be so kind to wait in here, someone will be with you shortly. Good day Miss. Ma'am." He nodded and left.



"Well shall we sit my dear?" Lotty suggested.

Beth thought the room looked like a comfortable sitting room, decorated in a neutral style, with comfortable seating and a large floor space. The only thing, setting it apart from a normal sitting or drawing room, were the floor to ceiling mirrors along the far and side wall. Beth took her seat beside her friend. "Don't look so nervous Beth. You'll have such fun once we get started."

Just at that the door opened and a rather exuberant young woman bounced in. The woman was dressed in wide legged ladies trousers, loose fitting cream silk blouse with a large brightly painted silk shawl over her shoulders. She had dark brown bobbed hair with a silk scarf, matching her shawl, tied round her head. She looked from head to toe like an artistic bohemian woman of the 1920's.

She was laden down with large catalogues, drawing pad and pencils; she dropped them as she tried to make her way over.

"Oh Blast! Would you believe it." she hurriedly tried to gather up her things. Beth and Lotty jumped up and began to help.

"Oh please, you don't have to do that Miss. I'm such a fool, always trying to do everything at once."

"Not at all, she we put these over on the table?" asked Beth.

"Thank you Miss. You're too kind. Madame Roux says I'm a birdbrain and doesn't know why this couture house puts up with me!"

Lotty and Beth laughed, instantly liking the eccentric girl.

"Who's Madame Roux?" asked Lotty.

"Oh she's in charge of the workroom and designer's."

This girl didn't look like she quite fitted into these types of posh surroundings.

"You don't look too concerned, aren't you afraid they will get rid of you then?" Beth smiled.

The young woman smirked at them and said very confidently. "I'm the best, I'm here to shake the cobwebs out of this place and I am."

"Good for you my dear! Let me introduce myself. I am Mrs Lotty Woodward and this is your client Miss Elizabeth Bentley."

"Pleased to meet you both, I'm Josephine Stafford, but everyone calls me Jo. Please sit." Jo dieted them back to the chairs then gathered up her catalogue books from the table.

"Now Miss. Bentley, I understand you are to be fitted for a wedding dress and an entire winter wardrobe. I can tell you when Lady Dalton telephoned with her instructions and requirements

Madame Roux nearly burst a blood vessel! It normal takes us much longer than the time you have given us but I understand Lady Dalton made her an offer she couldn't refuse as they say."

The three women laughed. "Oh that's so like Alex!" Lotty sniggered.

"Lady Dalton asked that a younger member of staff deal with your requirements. I think it was thought some of the other's may be a little, emm... Shall we say stuffy? And so here I am at your service."

"I'm sure you'll be an excellent choice Jo." Beth said, much more relaxed in this young woman's company.

"I understand you are to be the new Lady Dalton?" Jo asked.

"Beth looked from Lotty then back to Jo."Do you have any problem with that, with dealing with us?"

"My goodness no, I'll tell you a secret, I'm a regular at the Alley Cat, so you're in good company. I have heard of Lord Dalton but never met her." Jo deliberately changed Alex's title to one she was known for in their small community of women.

"Oh that's great. I glad we got you then." Beth said delightedly.

"So to business ladies. I thought we could look through catalogues, to get some ideas of your tastes and then I'll get the girl's in to measure you up. It'll take about four or five visits over the next few weeks, for fittings, in order to get all this done record time. That sounds like a plan?"

"In totally in your hands Jo."

"Excellent! Let's get to it."

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Across the street Jim Bentley went into the phone box to contact his wife.

"Mrs. Law? Its Jim Bentley here, I wonder if you could run next door and bring my wife to the telephone."

"I suppose. Hang on then." said the annoyed neighbour.

The Bentley's phone had taken out a long time ago as they couldn't pay their bills so they were always trying to use the next door neighbours.

"Jim? Is that you?"

"Yes it's me. I've found her Ada. Young trollop's all dolled up fancy, going into some posh dressmaker's with a posh woman. That girl has really landed on her feet. I did some digging and this Lord she's going to marry isn't just some commoner garden Lord, no he's the son of an Earl, an Earl no less. Can you believe it?"

"I still can't understand how someone like her could catch an Earl. They normally don't marry outside their own class. It wouldn't surprise me if she'd trapped him. Hooked him by laying on her back no doubt, got into trouble and made him marry her or she'd go public about the sprog."

"You're probably right luv." replied Jim.

"So what's our next move Jim?"

"Well I've got an address of where she works, I need to try and get her on her own, threaten her with telling her new fella some story about her. This Lord Dalton doesn't have any family, so I can't threaten that I'll tell his father about what type of girl she is. We'll need to be clever with this. I'll make contact with her and get back to you."

"Alright, good luck m'dear and Jim? Get what we deserve."

"I will, don't worry Ada. Good bye." Jim put down the phone and went back to looking out for his quarry across the street.

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Beth had a wonderful day, picking her new wardrobe. She had to admit to herself, she was beginning to enjoy being spoiled; although she was determined it wouldn't go to her head.

Alex had come over for dinner to Agnes's house. The older woman enjoyed the young couple's company a great deal.

"I must say Agnes. That was wonderful. I don't know how I survived in the city before I met you both." Alex was stuffed. She had come to the house bearing a large whole chicken, which were as scarce as hen's teeth and some nice wine.

"Well thank you Alex, but it's thanks to you for contribution. Where you found a whole chicken in this day and age I'll never know!" said Agnes.

Alex smirked at both women, folded her arms across her chest, looking very smug and said. "I have my sources."

"Oh Alex tell us!" exclaimed Beth. "Or did it fall off the back of a lorry?"

"Since you asked so nicely. We're pretty much self sufficient on the estate, in meat and vegetables, so Mrs Mcklusey sends up fresh meat and vegetables for me at the London flat. Not that I used them before Beth started cooking for me, I just used to hand them into the kitchens at the Foundation building. I'll have her send you up a basket Agnes."

"Oh please don't trouble yourself Alex." Agnes said a little shyly.

"Not at all. You both have to eat well. I insist." Alex's tone suggested there would be no further argument.

"Thank you then. I appreciate it. Sometimes I miss country life. I would have thought of living in the city before I came into this place." Agnes sounded a little sad.

Beth felt sad and a bit guilty at the thought of leaving the older woman in the city alone. She had been like a mother to her. *Maybe I should talk to Alex about it later?*

Later that evening, the three friends were sitting by the fire enjoying coffee, Alex with a sherry Agnes had offered, and a cigarette. Alex drained the last liquid from her glass and said,

"I better make tracks sweetheart. I'm over at the Foundation building tomorrow for a meeting, so I won't see you till lunchtime alright?"

"Yes, I'll walk you out." Beth stood to follow.

"Goodnight Agnes. Thank you for a lovely evening."

"Not at all Alex. Anytime. Goodnight." said Agnes.

Once out in the hall, Alex opened her arms for Beth and she cuddled in tight to Alex's chest.

"I hate saying goodnight darling. These weeks leading up to the wedding are taking forever."

"I know sweetheart." Alex stroked her girlfriend's cheek tenderly.

"Only a few weeks more though and you'll never get rid of me."

Beth sighed dramatically. "It would make me less sad if you told me where were going on honeymoon?"

Alex smiled and kissed her head. "I'm not falling for that little bit, I told you were going on a ship so you could get the correct clothes for your wardrobe and that's all you need to know."

"You're infuriating! You know that?"

"I do try. Now give me a kiss." The kiss started softly then deepened more than the tall woman had intended.

"Whoa! Reign those kisses in little bit or I'll never leave."

"That's the plan darling."

"Cheeky. I'll see you tomorrow afternoon, yes?"

"Definitely. Night darling."

"Goodnight little bit."

Alex's heart ached more and more every time she left her fiancée. *At least it's not for much longer, and then I'm never going to let you out of my sight Lady Elizabeth Dalton. Hmm. sounds good!* Alex thought, and with a smile on her face she jumped into her Jaguar and sped off towards the flat.

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Jim Bentley observed his young niece open up the building across the street. *She's on her own this morning. This could be the day.* He thought.

He crept up the stone steps, made his way along the corridor until he reached the office door which had **Dalton Foundation** printed on the frosted glass. He knocked and heard his niece say. "Come in?"

Beth looked up from her paperwork into the eyes of the last place she expected to see her uncle Jim.

She jumped up from her seat. "What are you doing here?" she asked in a panicky voice.

"Calm down girl. Is that any way to greet your only uncle?" He waltzed in and sat on the other side of her desk, without being invited.

"We both know we're not a close family, so tell me what it is you want and how did you find me?"

"We're you supposed to be hiding? Your Aunt Ada has been awfully worried about you." His insincere tone was sickening to Beth.

"I'm sure she was. I ask again why you are here?"

"Well we heard in the village that you are to be married. An extremely fortunate marriage I understand."

*Ah so that's it. She thought. They smell money.*

"I am to be married. What of it?"

"To an Earl no less. The Earl of Sheffield, Alex Dalton isn't it? And you didn't invite your only family? Your father would be ashamed of you girl. He would want you to look after your family now you are about to enter a very advantageous marriage." He said coolly.

Beth felt the fury rise within her. "Don't you ever mention my father's name. He was no brother of yours and he would be disgusted with your behaviour!" Beth noticed he assumed Alex was a man, she chose not to correct him.

"We want recompense and we will get it or I will give your new gentlemen a visit, I am sure there are a few things he would like to know about you."

"Alex knows everything about me. What could you possibly want recompense for? What did you and aunt Ada ever do for me?" She said angrily.

"We took you in when you had nothing, gave you the food off our table and got nothing in return."

"Took me in! You brought me to live with you in order to get your hands on an inheritance you thought I had, and when you discovered no money, you worked my fingers to the bone! You two have never done a hard day's work in your life and expect to live on the backs of others."

Jim smacked his hand on the desk causing Beth to jump.

"Whatever you say girl! We will get what we want. You've landed on your feet, no doubt by behaving like a little tart on your back!"

Beth clasped her hand to her mouth. "Get out! Get out now!" She raced over and yanked the door open, trying to encourage him to leave.

"We want a monthly income and some place to stay otherwise your Earl will be hearing some stories about you, I have no care whether they are true or not. I'm sure he won't want to marry a slut. If that doesn't convince him then I'll go to the papers and let them know what kind of girl the Earl of Sheffield is marrying. The upper classes never want scandal." He grabbed Beth's bicep tightly and carried on by saying. "Meet me at Speakers corner in Hyde Park on Friday at 10 o'clock with your decision. If you don't turn up you know what will happen. Choose wisely." Jim left the office quickly leaving Beth standing in tears.

*What will I do? I don't think Alex would believe anything he said but he could embarrass her dreadfully in the newspapers. I don't know what's best.*

She sat at her desk with her head in her hands.

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"Beth? Beth? Are you alright?" Alex had popped her head round her office door, trying to get her fiancée's attention.

Beth stared off into the distance.

"Beth!" Alex came over to her and shook her on the shoulder.

The young woman gasped with fright. The incident with her uncle had shaken her. She instinctively rubbed the bicep where Jim had grabbed her.

"Are you alright sweetheart?" Alex was slightly concerned.

"Oh sorry darling, I was dreaming. What was it you wanted?"

"I just wanted a quick look at the file on the east end cottage hospital." Alex asked, just a little concerned.

Beth jumped up and got the file from the cabinet.

"Here you are Alex."

"Thanks sweetheart. You sure you're alright?"

"Yes, just fine. Alex I know I don't really stay until Friday but can I stay tonight? I just don't feel like sleeping alone tonight."

"Of course. If that's what you want. You have a dress fitting tomorrow, do you not?"

Beth nodded.

"That's fine then, I'll drop you at the Woodward's in the morning before I head into the office. I'll just be another half an hour sweetheart and then we'll get going. Do you want to eat out?"

"If you wouldn't mind darling could we just have something at the flat." She needed time to think and to decide what to tell Alex.

"Well alright but you're not cooking again. You look a little tired. How about we take home some good old fish and chips?"

"That would be just the ticket." Beth smiled.

"Excellent! Well I won't be long."

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Alex was convinced there was something wrong. Beth had been distant ever since Alex had arrived at work at lunchtime. They had a quiet dinner of fish and chips, Beth not saying much. Alex lit her cigarette and watched as her fiancée cleared away the dinner things.

*Maybe it's the wedding? Is it all getting too much for her? I haven't really given much thought to how her life has changed. Maybe I have pushed her too far.*

"Would you like me to pour you a drink while you put the things away little bit?" Alex asked gently.

"Emm, no, I have a bit of a headache so I think I'll take a couple of aspirin and have an early night if you don't mind." Beth said quietly.

*Bugger! There is something wrong. Is she getting cold feet?* Alex's chest tightened.

"Okay, I'll get your pills and meet you in the bedroom; I could do with an early night as well."

"Oh no Alex, I'll be fine. You know you love to have a brandy, cigar and to listen to some music. Go and relax."

"Oh right. I'll be in later then." Alex felt rejected. *Surely if something was wrong she'd tell me? Oh for God's sake Alex, give the girl some space! She'll open up when she's ready.*

Alex chastised herself.

Half an hour later, she stood by the fireplace. She'd forced herself to stop from going into the bedroom. It just wasn't in Alex's nature to stand passive, if there was a problem, she wanted to grab the bull by the horns and sort it, especially if that problem was being experienced by her girl.

*I've had enough of this!* She stubbed her cigar out, put off the record player and locked up the flat. When she entered her bedroom, she found it in darkness. Beth was curled up on her side apparently sleeping.

The tall woman quietly changed into her sleeping attire, and slipped into bed. She lay with her hands behind her head, staring at the ceiling. Alex felt an imaginary gap between them and it disturbed her greatly.

On the other side of the bed, Beth lay awake, the evidence of tears shed apparent on her puffy face. All she wanted to do was turn round and be taken in Alex's arms, the one place she knew it was



safe, she had gone over it in her mind all evening, she saw no way out of it than to tell Alex, and if she was angry at her then the young blond woman would just have to deal with it.

"Alex? Are you asleep?" Beth said in a small voice.

"No. What is it sweetheart?" Alex said as she turned to face the girl, she was a little shocked that her girl had been crying.

"I need to tell you something; can we sit up and talk?"

"Alright" Alex's stomach clenched her old fears of rejection and inadequacy surfaced.

Beth put on the light and they both leaned up against the headboard.

"I want you to stay calm until I've finished telling everything. Do you agree?"

"Yes. Just tell me. I knew there was something wrong."

"This morning I had a visitor at the office. It was my Uncle Jim. Somehow he had found out where I was because there was talk in the village in that I was going to marry an Earl. He thinks you're a man, I didn't correct him, and he didn't need to know everything."

"What did he want?" Alex turned round completely, and wiped away tears that had restarted rolling down her cheeks.

"He wanted what my aunt and uncle value most in life, Money. When they heard I was to be married, they saw a free meal ticket. I'm ashamed that I share a last name with them." Beth said angrily.

"Not for long little bit." Alex reminded her.

Beth managed a weak smile. "Yes. I can't wait till the paperwork comes through and I can be a Dalton."

Alex took her hand and kissed it tenderly.

"So what made him think I would give him money?"

"Well I think he expected me to give money without telling you. He threatened to come and tell you stories about me, he would make them up if need be."

Alex jumped up out of bed and began pacing, her anger rising.

"When I told him that I was confident you wouldn't believe a word, he suggested that he would go to the newspapers with some stories, about me, to embarrass you. He said either you would pay him a monthly allowance or you would leave me because of the scandal. He said some scurrilous things

about how I managed to win an Earls love. He told me to meet him on Speakers corner in Hyde Park at 10 o'clock on Friday or he would go to you, then the Newspaper's."

Alex, who was standing staring out the bedroom window, turned and dropped to her knees beside the bed and stroked her beloved's face.

"He wanted just this monthly allowance?" Alex asked calmly.

"That, and a house for himself and my aunt. I've been so worried Alex, I didn't know what to do! I felt so guilty that my family could bring you such shame!"

"Shh! little bit. Come here." Alex pulled Beth towards her by grasping the girl's bicep.

"Ah!" Beth pulled her arm back sharply and rubbed it vigorously.

"Did I hurt you?" Alex looked puzzled. *I didn't grab her that hard?*

"Let me see your arm." Alex ordered. Beth was reluctant; she knew that Alex's temper was fierce when those she loved were threatened, from when she was attacked in the office by Albert Pincher.

"Beth, show me now!" She shouted.

Beth put out her arm and Alex saw black and blue fingerprints outlined on the girls arm.

"He touched you?" She asked coolly. When Beth nodded Alex jumped up and smashed her fist down on the dressing table.

"Bastard!" Alex shouted.

Beth jumped in fright. "Alex, please! Calm down!"

Alex turned to see the sight of fear and uncontrollable tears on the face of her sweetheart. She immediately calmed down and came to her knees by the side of the bed and gathered her girl in her arms.

"I'm sorry for giving you a fright little bit but no one touches you, especially not in violence."

Beth took solace from the feeling of strength from being in Alex's arms.

The older woman pulled back and kissed her head.

"Beth, I don't want you to give this matter another thought. I will meet with your uncle and you will never hear of it again."

"But...."

"No." Alex cut her off. "Not another word. I am quite firm on this Beth." She warned.

"Whatever you think best darling." Alex stroked Beth's cheek.

"The only thing I want you to think about is our wedding preparations. I want you to enjoy yourself, but promise me if they approach you again you will let me know straight away. Do you promise?"

"Of course, Alex." Beth promised.

"Good girl! Now shall we snuggle in and get some sleep? You have a dress fitting bright and early."

They assumed their usual sleeping position, with Beth's head on Alex's shoulder. Beth drifted off feeling safe and a weight lifted off her shoulders. Alex planned her next move.

*Jim Bentley, you will be sorry you ever got back in touch with your niece.* Alex thought angrily.

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Beth brought Alex's breakfast plate out from the kitchen and placed it in front of her. Alex folded up her newspaper and said, in a very poor American accent. "Thanks Sweet cheeks!" and smacked her girl on the bottom as she walked away.

Alex was determined to keep a light hearted atmosphere this morning, after last night's strain.

"Oh! That was sore!" complained Beth.

"Aw! Poor baby!" Alex laughed.

"And where my Lord did you get 'sweet cheeks'?" Beth stood with her hands on her hips.

"That American gangster picture I took you to last week, remember? That's what the gangster called his moll."

Beth smiled and shook her head, went back to the kitchen to retrieve her own plate and returned to join the tall woman at the breakfast table.

Alex looked down at her plate. A full English breakfast of sausages, eggs, fried bread, bacon and black pudding. "This is fantastic little bit. You really can cook, but changing the subject, I was thinking, would you like me to buy us a house for when we are in London, rather than the flat? Like the Woodward's? Our original London home was the Foundation building, but I can buy us a new one. "

Beth considered her answer and said. "If you don't mind darling, I would rather stay here when were in London. It gives me a chance to look after you myself, at Dencotte there's a full staff and I

don't get the opportunity to take care of you. If we got a large house, you would insist on staff. I'd rather this be our own private bolt hole."

Alex smiled. It gave her a warm feeling inside at the thought of her new wife taking care of her.

"Sounds splendid. Just you and me."

"Alex there was something else I wanted to ask you about. You know Agnes has been like a mother to me."

"Uh huh hmm. This is so good little bit?" She said as she chomped her way through her breakfast.

"Well it was just the other night, when she was talking about missing the country. I think she'll be lonely when I go and I think the only reason she doesn't sell up is that she doesn't think the sale of the house would be enough to buy something and keep her in her old age. Do you think we could help her in any way?" Alex looked up and met her eyes.

*Oh no! I hope I haven't overstepped my bounds.* She thought worriedly.

Alex saw the look of worry on the young woman's face. *How can she be worried? Doesn't she know by now I would give her the world!* Alex thought.

"Of course! Why didn't I think of it before! Yes, we should find her a nice cottage on the estate, that way she can live very comfortably on the sale of her London home. She will be good company for you when I'm not there and I'm sure Mrs Mcklusey and Agnes will get on like a house on fire! I'll give my steward Jones, a call and see what's available." Jones was Alex Dalton's Steward.

Beth jumped up and raced over to sit in Alex's lap, and proceeded to kiss her with great passion.

Returning the kiss with equal passion, Alex ran her big hand up the inside of her girl's skirt. Beth moaned and pulled away, not wanting things to get out of control again.

Alex growled into Beth's neck, causing her to laugh.

"Is there anything else I can do for you? I would gladly do it if I get more kisses like that!"

"You don't have to do anything for these kisses my lord. Thank you for doing that for Agnes." Beth gave Alex's nose a gentle peck.

"Not at all and I don't want you ever to be nervous about asking me for anything that you want. If it is within my power, you shall have it. Now we better go. I'm going to stop and have a word with Poni when I drop you off Grosvenor Street." Alex said.

"Alright, let me clear up these things. I love you My Lord."

"I love you little bit. Now let's get to it."

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Alex and Poni waved off their other halves at the front door of Grosvenor Street and Poni led Alex through to her study.

Poni sat at her desk and offered Alex, who was sitting on the opposite side, the cigarette box.

"Thank you." said Alex as they both lit up.

"So, what's the problem old man?" asked Poni.

"How do you know anything is wrong?"

"Alex. I know." She said with a smile.

"Of course, remember when we first met Beth, she told us of her aunt and uncle?"

"Yes. I seem to recall they were quite beastly to her."

"That's the ones. When she left them, she took great pains to ensure they wouldn't find out her whereabouts, but they did. Gossip I think in the village of Ambleton. They heard that Beth was to marry the Earl of Sheffield."

"They think.....?"

"Yes, that I'm a man. Her uncle, Jim Bentley, approached her at the office, when I was at the Foundation Building. He initially wanted money from her, or he would come to me with some cock and bull story. When she responded that she was confident that I wouldn't believe him, he threatened to go to the newspapers with stories about my new wife. He expects either I will pay him off or I will drop Beth for fear of a scandal. He wants a monthly income for his wife and himself and a house somewhere."

"So what are we going to do about it?" Poni asked.

Alex smiled. "I knew I could count on you my friend."

"Always, so what's the plan?"

"He told Beth to meet him at Speakers corner, Friday at 10 o'clock. We will be there in her stead. I'll also telephone our mutual friend Tommy Martin; see what information we can dig up about Jim and Ada Bentley. We may need it at some other time."

Poni and Alex had met Tommy Martin during the war, when they were stationed on the same base. He was a man who got information, sorted out problems and operated on the wrong side of the law. He also had good contacts in London's criminal underworld. Tommy and the two women had become friends after working together and after saving him from a particular hairy situation, he had promised always to help if ever the two women needed anything.

"Bentley has to be warned Poni. He grabbed Beth, left bruises on her arm."

Poni looked furious. "We will make sure he doesn't make that mistake again my lord." Poni said darkly.

"Thank you. May I use your phone?"

"Certainly"

Alex picked up the phone, dialled and said.

"Tommy? Alex Dalton here. I have a little job for you."

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Lotty sipped her cup of tea as she watched Beth being fitted for her wardrobe at Hartnell's.

"What do you think Miss Bentley?" asked Jo.

Beth was stood in her underwear. With the front and back of an unfinished dress on her, seamstress and attendants were pinning bits and pieces of material to her.

"It seems to fit a lot better than last Jo. Do you think you'll have everything ready in time?" Beth asked.

"All the material is cut and ready for fitting and stitching. It will be ready. We won't let you down. The understanding that Lord Dalton came to with Madame Roux, well let's just say it wouldn't be in our interests to let you down." said Jo.

"You are very talented. Your designs are wonderful. I usually go to the French fashion houses for my clothes but I may be willing to look at your designs next time round. Do you plan on staying here or moving on?" asked Lotty.

"It's my dream to start my own house; I hope I will be able to. It's a hard business to get started in. Costs are so high; you really need a lot of backing, which I do not have. I'm the daughter of a dock worker; my mother took in sewing to make ends meet. That's where I got it from; she had a talent,

but had no way of pursuing her dreams. I made my way through art college waitressing and the like. It's been an amazing achievement for me to even get my job here." Jo Explained.

"Don't give up on your dreams Jo, you're too good." said Lotty.

"Yes never give up. I love your designs, am sure others will think the same." Beth added.

Jo looked at the two women and smiled. "Thank you." She was not used to praise.

"Well, let's get onto your evening wear." Jo said as one of the girls brought over the next garment.

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Alex pulled parked in front of Agnes's house. She was dropping Beth home after work. They sat on in the car both women reluctant to leave each other.

"It's Friday tomorrow." Beth said, unsure of how to bring up the subject.

"Yes sweetheart, it usually comes after Thursday." Alex said with a cheeky smile.

"My uncle....."

Alex interrupted her straight away. "We discussed this the other night. You are to consider this matter already handled. All that should concern you is preparing for the wedding. Everything else is under control alright? Trust me." Beth looked into her beloved's calming blue eyes.

"Of course I do. Just be careful alright? I'm sorry my family has brought you this turmoil." Beth said, embarrassed by it all.

Alex took her pocket watch out of her waistcoat pocket. The pocket watch had belonged to Beth's father, given to him by her mother on the occasion of their marriage. Beth had thought it the perfect present for Alex, on their engagement.

"Look sweetheart." Alex lifted the watch and held it in front of them. "This is your family, the memories of you father and mother. You're aunt and uncle; do not deserve the name Bentley. It will be taken care of. Now as well as that matter, do you remember I won't be in tomorrow afternoon either?" Alex reminded her.

"Yes, you're going to your tailor to get kitted out for the wedding." She smiled and stroked the big woman's face.

"You will look so handsome! Well, you always do." She rested her head on Alex's broad chest.

"I'm sending someone over to the office, just to help with anything you need doing while am not there."

"Alex what could I possibly need help with? They'll be sitting there doing nothing. Your just sending someone to watch over me while you're away in the afternoon, aren't you?" She asked suspiciously.

"Humour me."

"But..."

"Please. Humour me." Alex said flatly.

"Oh Fine! You never leave me any choice anyway! Who is it?"

"A business associate of mine. I need to protect you. It's my job. Now go and get a good night's sleep." asked Alex.

"Alright, I'm off then. Will you at least give me a telephone call after your morning appointment, for me?"

"Alright, I'll call from the tailor. Now kiss?"

She bent over to the passenger seat and Beth gave her one kiss on the lips and smiled.

"That's all you're getting for being such a fusspot!" Beth gave her a final kiss on nose and jumped out of the car, laughing, leaving Alex somewhat forlorn.

Beth popped her head through the car window, feeling a little guilty.

"I will miss you darling."

"I know, don't worry another few weeks and I shall be chasing you through the corridors of Dencotte and I will catch you."

"I can't wait. I love you. See you tomorrow evening?"

"Yes. Goodnight. I love you little bit."

Beth waved as she watched Alex drive away.

*Please take care of yourself tomorrow darling. I don't know what I would do if you were hurt because of me.*

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When Alex entered her flat, she immediately picked up the phone.

"Tommy? It's Alex. Any news?"

"Alright Guv'nor, I've had a man on him morning till night. He's staying at a working men's hostel. Spends his days in the pub, a waster, like you thought. He'll be no problem to handle. Are you sure you don't want me and my boy's to handle things for you? No need to get your hands dirty."

"Thanks Tommy, but he gets one chance since he's Beth's family, but if he doesn't take that we will speak again. Anything on his background?" Alex asked.

"Petty thieving, fraud, never done a day's work in his life. I'm still trying to find that one thing we can use to our advantage. His war record is shady; I'm looking into that just now. I think there may be something there to work with."

"Sounds promising. Can I ask you something else? I have an afternoon appointment after Poni and I deal with this matter in the morning, could you send someone over to sit with my girl in the office till I pick her up? I'm a bit concerned he may take reprisals out on her after meeting with me."

"Not a problem guv. My boys will still be watching him, so he won't get near but I'll go over myself, I'd like to meet the girl that's tamed the guv'nor"

"Thanks Tommy, you're a good friend. I owe you, this girl is my life."

"You owe me nothing Alex, I'll forever be in your debt and you'll always be my friend. You know you can trust me with your girl. Does she know I'm coming?"

"I told her I was sending someone over from the Foundation but I'm sure you'll introduce yourself much better than could. Em....I haven't told her about my time during the war, but you can tell her how we met."

"You can count on me. I won't squeal on yea. I'll only tell the embarrassing stories." He joked.

"Thank you again. Goodnight."

"Night guv."

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Alex and Poni walked through Hyde Park, towards Speakers corner with a swagger. They made a commanding sight. Alex dressed in a grey pinstripe suit with the edge of a handkerchief popping out the top pocket, crisp white shirt, thin grey tie with the gold tie pin Beth had given her for Christmas, all topped off with a grey trilby hat.

Poni's suit was a similar cut, but in light brown with matching trilby. They looked for the entire world like two gentlemen out for a morning stroll.

Speaker's corner in Hyde Park was where traditionally anyone could come and make a speech about any subject. People would gather round in curiosity as members of the public would make speeches on the issues of the day, politics or religion, but at this time of day wouldn't usually have many speech makers.

Alex and Poni saw a tall man looking about furtively up ahead. He was dressed in a suit, but it was rather worn and scruffy and on his head he wore a flat cap.

Alex nodded to Poni, thinking the man up ahead was the man they were looking for. Alex had seen pictures of Beth's father and the man up ahead did have some resemblance, but not to Beth, she was her mother's double.

Jim looked at his watch. *Ten o'clock and that no good girl isn't here. I felt sure she would be here. Well she'll regret it.* He thought.

He dropped his cigarette stub on the ground to put it out, when he lifted his head, he was confronted with two well dressed gentlemen. One tall with dark hair, the other the same height as himself with lighter brown hair.

The tall one said. "Mr. Bentley?"

"Who wants to know?" asked Jim.

"I'm Lord Dalton and this is my friend and associate Poni Woodward. We're here to discuss terms for you demands of Miss Bentley." Alex said in a neutral voice, not wanting to frighten the man away.

Jim was suddenly nervous and gulped. "Ah...I see, she told you then."

"Yes. Shall we take a walk and discuss terms?" The park was busy with people, Women with children, nannies with prams. Alex needed to get him somewhere a little quieter.

"Alright, but I want my money one way, or another." He followed along beside them. Studying them more carefully he noticed they were women! The shorter of the two even had longer hair that was pinned up tight under her hat.

Alex directed him behind the old bandstand, which was surrounded by trees on both sides.

"What's all this! You're two women! Where's Lord Dalton!" raved Jim. Alex and Poni stood together, their hands in their trouser pockets.

"I am Lord Dalton Jim; well my friends call me that. If you'd bothered to find out about who your niece was marrying, you would have discovered, that I am women, The Countess of Sheffield and

Baroness of Hallwood." They began to walk forward, forcing Jim to back up against the wall of the bandstand.

*What kind of people has Beth got involved with? Women playing at being men? The papers will lap this up, Aristocracy too,* thought Jim, his mind racing at a thousand miles an hour.

"If I don't get what I want I'll go to the papers. I will! That girl owes us, she's family, and we took her in and got nothing. Now her family is your responsibility. "Jim warned.

Alex smiled and said.

"Let me tell you what's going to happen, Jimbo. I'm going to go easy on you, out of respect for Beth's father, but that will only wash this once. I'm going to give you £50 and you're going to go on your merry way and neither I nor Beth will ever hear of you again.

I have contacts with every major newspaper in this country, if you contact them, they will contact me and the police, and you will be charged with blackmail.

I am a very dangerous enemy Jim and I have very dangerous friends both in high and low places. Now don't be a fool all your life and accept this deal."

Alex was now face to face with Jim.

"What kind of sick abominations dress as men? I knew my niece was a tart but I didn't know she was a tart for women like you. She'd obviously open her legs for anyone with money. Man, women or beast!" He spat.

Alex's face turned to fury, as quick as a flash she grabbed Jim and threw him up against the wall, placing her arm across his throat.

"Don't you ever talk about Beth like that." Alex punched him in the gut and he doubled over coughing.

"That's for touching my fiancé. I advise you never to put your stinking hands within one foot of her ever again or you will be in danger of your life."

Alex straightened her suit jacket as Poni hauled Jim to his feet.

"Think on this, I have had men following your every move since yesterday, they're watching now." She turned and pointed over to a big muscular man in black suit near the railings of the park.

"If I can do that then think how much worse I could make life for you. I have contacts and friends in the Police, Scotland Yard, the House of Commons and the highest reaches of Government."

Alex towered over him, her eyes like steel, looking directly into Jim's quivering face.

I AM A VERY DANGEROUS PERSON TO KNOW! Now do you accept the deal?"

Jim, who was still clutching his stomach, nodded his head in agreement.

"Good." Alex pulled out her wallet and peeled off £50 pounds from the large wad of notes she had there.

She threw the money down at his feet. "That's all you're getting from me in this lifetime. I had better not see you again or it won't be good for your health. Now run along Jimbo."

Jim grabbed the money at his feet and did indeed run, as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Well that's then that sorted. I have a wedding suit to buy."

"You said it old friend." laughed Alex.

"Let's go."

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Over at the office, Beth was supposed doing her paperwork, but was instead was staring at the phone, nervously tapping her pencil against the desk, waiting for it to ring.

A knock at the outer office door interrupted her thoughts. She was immediately on alert.

She'd had a few unwelcome visitors in her time working at the office so she was on her guard.

"Come in."

A man's head popped round the door. He had a bright smiling face and spoke in a thick London East end, cockney accent. "Alrite treacle! Alex sent me round. Can I come in?"

"Come in."

As he entered the room, Beth noticed the huge man mountain that came behind him.

Beth's eyes went wide at the sight of the big man.

Tommy realised the young women was a little startled by his big friends presence.

"My names Tommy Martin and this is Tiny, he works for me. The guv asked me to come over this afternoon while she takes care of a little business."

"Tiny? Really?"

"Not at all, don't be put off by his size Miss. He's a big softie really.

She looked at the pair. Tommy was shorter than Alex by a good five inches. He had short, cropped, receding brown hair, slicked back neat and tidy. Although smaller than average he looked a powerful stocky man, he wore an extremely smart black suit with white shirt and black tie. He looked every inch the cheeky East end boy made good.

His friend Tiny must have been about 6 ft 8 or 9 inches. Broad, shouldered and made her think of the huge ancient warriors of Britain, her father had written about. He had black hair collar length hair and a frightening scarred face, but when Tommy introduced him; his face broke out into the most charming smile.

"Pleased to meet you Miss."

"Em... you too, please will you both sit down and do call me Beth." She gestured to the two free seats.

"Thank you kindly Beth."

"Tiny give Beth the present." He nudged his tall friend.

"Yeah boss. Ere you go Miss. Eh... I mean Beth." Tiny was holding a box which he handed over to her. In the box were four of the largest cream cakes she had ever seen.

"Oh my! whose ration book did you have to steal to get hold of these?"

"Tommy gave her a cheeky grin and said."Probably best you don't ask, no what I mean? Thought it would be nice to share a cuppa till the guv gets back."

"Well, I better get the kettle on then." She said standing and making her way over to the kitchen area.

*How on earth does Alex know people like that? They seem very nice but probably not if you get on the wrong side of them.*

"So what kind of business are you in Tommy?"

"Well let's just say I head up an organisation that has many business interests. I've got a finger in every pie luv." Tommy said with a wink.

Beth smiled; she could help but like him. She lifted the tea tray to bring it over when Tommy said.

"Oi Tiny! You going to let a lady carry that heavy tray?"

Tiny jumped up. "Oh sorry boss." He took the tray from her. "Please sit Miss Beth."

"Thank you Tiny."

*These are the most extraordinary men I've ever met. How odd!* She thought.

Beth began to pour out the tea for them. "So how do you know Alex Tommy?"

"We met during the war. I was stationed at the same RAF barracks as Alex and Poni; we became friends worked together on a few emm....missions." Tommy said mysteriously.

This piqued Beth's interest. "Alex never talks about her time during the war; it was intelligence she and Poni worked in wasn't it?" She asked innocently.

Tommy smiled then lit a cigarette. "I think that's for Alex to tell you about luv. They were some difficult times during the war, sometimes its better just not to dwell on it."

"Perhaps, maybe she'll feel more able to talk one day. Poni met Lotty during the war, do you know her?"

"Yes, I remember Lotty. Lovely lady, Poni was lucky to get her hands on her. They were a different group of friends."

"Group? What do you mean? I thought there just the three of them who were close?"

"Yes, yes. I mean group as in the people in the barracks." He said a little too quickly.

*I think there's more to the time they spent during the war than they've let on. I'll let him off the hook for now.*

"What were they like when their young?" She asked.

"Pretty much as they are now really. When I met them, I thought Alex and Poni were a couple of odd geezers."

"Why? Because they're strong, tough, like women and wear men's clothes?" Beth said a bit defensively.

"Woah hold you horse's luv!"

Tommy was impressed that the young girl was sticking up for Alex.

"I don't mean that, in fact when you get to know me better you'll see I'm not as much a traditional bloke as you think. No I mean they're toffs, but like you've never seen before. They're down to earth, don't mind getting their hands dirty and help people that need it. They don't always play by the rules, they do what needs to get done and have done a lot of good all over the country and in the east end where I'm from. They'll always have my respect. You've found yourself a good partner Beth, look after her well and she'll look after you. She deserves it."

Beth was heartened at the level of esteem and loyalty this man held for Alex.

*They come from such different worlds, but yet she commands respect in high society and in the underworld. I've got myself someone so special.* She thought to herself.

"Tiny, take a walk round outside. Make sure everything's as it should be."

"Yes boss." He got up and left the office.

"I'm sure everything is fine Tommy, Alex didn't need to have someone babysit me."

"I've had a nice time, cuppa tea, a cake and a lovely chat. Hasn't been that bad has it?"

"Oh not at all Tommy, I enjoy hearing about Alex when she was younger."

"You must come over have a cuppa meet ma mum. She'd love you and she'd love to see Alex again."

"That would be nice Tommy. I'll ask Alex."

Just then the phone rang.

"Hello? Dalton Foundation, how can I help you?"

"Hello Sweetheart." The low timbre of Alex's voice came over the telephone making Beth's stomach tingle.

"Are you alright? Did you sort things out with Uncle Jim?"

"Everything dealt with. You don't need to give it another thought. Understand?"

"Yes, Darling."

"Good girl. I won't be long, I'm just getting measured up for my suit and choosing the fabric. I'll be another hour tops then I'll take you out for dinner. Is Tommy still there?"

"Yes he hasn't let me out of his sight. I also met a charming chap called Tiny."

Beth smiled at Tommy who smiled back.

Alex laughed. "Ah, Tiny. He's a good chap, not as fearsome as he looks. Well I'll get to it then. See you soon. I love little bit."

"Love you darling. Goodbye."

Beth put down the phone and said to Tommy.

"She worries too much."

"With good reason I've heard. Apart from the aggro with your uncle, I understand you had a little trouble with a weasel that got too attached to you."

Beth's heart sped up thinking about it. She had been trying to put it to the back of her mind, but knew they would have to face the trial sooner or later. Alex's solicitor thought it might be another couple of months before it would be heard in court, as he was undergoing psychiatric assessment.

"Yes, it was very frightening."

Tommy saw the colour had drained from her face reliving the incident.

"You have no need to worry about anything anymore luv. You've found a champion for yourself in Alex and you've gained the protection of me and my associates. We look after our own. Its men like that that gives us blokes a bad name. Anyone who hurts a woman or a child should be made to pay."

For the first time since he came into the office, Beth could see the frightening side of Tommy's nature. The tone of his voice and the look on his face could make anyone tremble.

They chatted on quite happily for some time before Tiny came in.

"Look who I found coming in boss?"

Alex came in behind him. Beth got up and went straight over to greet the tall woman.

"Everything alright darling?"

Alex cupped her cheek and gave her a soft kiss.

"Absolutely sweetheart." Beth moved to Alex's side but the tall woman kept a firm possessive grip round her waist.

Tommy came forward and shook her hand.

"Good to see you guv'nor."

"You too Tommy, how's your Mum?"

"Bossing me and my boy's around as usual, you know sometimes I think people are more frightened of me Mum than me!"

They laughed.

"And how are you and your family Tiny?"

"Doin great. Got two boys now guv."

"Good show, good show."



Alex turned and gave Beth a kiss."Will you excuse us sweetheart while I have a chat with Tommy in my office?"

"Of course darling, I'll just get my things packed and ready to go."

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Tommy followed Alex into her office and Tiny stayed with Beth. Once Alex shut the door Tommy said.

"Everything go off alright?"

"Without a hitch, I think I made my position very clear. If I or Beth see him again, he'll be sorry."

"Just give me a shout, if you ever need him sorted out. I wanted to talk to you about Albert Pincher. Your girl shouldn't have to go through too much at the trial, my boys inside had a quiet word with him and he's come to the sensible decision to plead guilty at the court case. So everything should just go through on the nod."

"You didn't have to do that but thanks all the same."

"Anything for you guv'nor."

"Was it quiet here this afternoon?"

"Yeah very. What a lovely girl you've got there. No wonder you've snapped her up."

"She's perfect and I don't intend to let her go. Did she ask about the war?"

"Just how we met, she was curious, but I said that was up to you to tell."

"I will one day; I just don't like to think about it. You'll be coming to the wedding?"

"Of Course, I have to see Lord Alex Dalton have the old ball and chain welded onto her leg." He smirked.

"Alright laugh all you like, but you know as well as I do that when you meet the one that completes you, it's like nothing on earth."

"You're not wrong there guv." He smiled, thinking of his own love.

"You'll get your invitations out soon."

"Well I better get goin. You've got a girl to take out for dinner."

Alex rose and shook Tommy's hand again.

"Again many thanks for your help, and my regards to your better half."

"Thanks. Remember I'm always just a phone call away for you. Take care, guv'nor."

"Good bye Tommy."

She walked Tommy and Tiny out.

Tommy kissed Beth's hand and said. "Lovely meeting you treacle. Be lucky."

"Goodbye and bye Tiny."

"Bye Miss. Guv." He tipped his hat and followed Tommy out.

Once they were gone Beth said. "My Lord, you know the most strange and lovely people!"

Alex smiled. "Shall we get dinner?"

"Yes, I've missed you today and I can't wait to get you to myself!"

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Alex and Beth decided to have an evening walk in the park before returning back at Agnes's house. They walked arm in arm, passing other couples along the way.

"So what did you think of Tommy then?" asked Alex with a smile.

"Well, he was very nice to me but I think he could be very intimidating to the wrong sorts of people, and Tiny! Well he looks just scary!"

"He's meant to look scary sweetheart. In the east end of London men like Tommy and his boy's keep some sort of order, I'm not saying it's right, or wrong, but there are places where police constables don't want to go and if someone steps out of line in the community, men like Tommy sort it out. I can't condone breaking the law, but I do know the type of honourable man Tommy is, I discovered that during the war, and he certainly doesn't go looking for trouble, but if it comes his way, he takes care of it."

"He certainly thinks a lot of you darling. Will you ever tell me about the war? Why he thinks he owes you so much?" Beth asked hopefully.

Alex stopped and turned to look at Beth. "I will, one day. It's not a matter of trust, please believe me, it's just....." She sighed and stroked the side of the young woman's face.

"War is not the glorious, noble thing it's portrayed as in newsreels and films at the picture house. It's a dirty, bloody and mostly dishonourable business. You do things that need to be done in the service of your country, but these things aren't easily forgotten and they can take a heavy toll. The things Poni, Tommy and I had to do, well they are hard to talk about when you are all of a sudden back in the post war world. We share a bond that will last a lifetime."

She leaned down and gave Beth a chaste kiss. "I will be ready. One day, when the time is right."

"I understand darling."

"Thank you. Let's get you home shall we?"

They made their way back to the car.

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Poni Woodward climbed into bed beside her wife. She immediately leaned over began stroking her bare arm. Lotty was sat up in bed with a clipboard, writing notes and arrangements for the wedding.

Without looking up from her clipboard, Lotty said.

"So you've come to bed at last my darling?"

"I was just finishing some accounts that needed doing." Poni said, her strokes became bolder, starting at Lotty's neck and down past the outside of her breast, finishing where the bedcovers began at her waist.

Still keeping her eyes on the text, Lotty said. "Are we still in the black my love?"

Poni smiled then leaned in to whisper in her wife's ear. "Plenty enough to keep you in the finest of dresses my little piglet." and she proceeded to bestow light kisses to the side of Lotty's face and neck.

Lotty, amused by her spouse's obvious intentions, lifted her head and said. "So now you thought you'd come and crave my attention?"

"I always crave your attention, now why don't you put down that down and enjoy some quiet time with your Poni? Hmmm?"

"I want you to tell me how you got on at the tailors today?"

"Later, now I need some of your sweet kisses my little piglet."

Poni tried to pluck the clipboard out of Lotty's hands and began harder, more insistent kisses and bites to her neck.

Lotty felt the warmth spread throughout her body. When her spouse turned her attention to her in this way, Lotty would usually never deny her, but she had too much to do and was determined for Alex's day to go off without a hitch.

"You are a sappy fool my Poni!" Lotty said.

"Hm! You love it my dear." Poni's movements became bolder. She grasped Lotty's breast, and felt the nipple harden through the lace topped silk night dress.

Poni hovered over her wife and looked deeply into her eyes. Poni found her happiness here, looking down into her wife's eyes, from the first time they laid eyes on each other, there had only been and would only be Lotty in her eyes. Even though they had been together for just over 8 years, their passion never waned; in fact it grew stronger with each passing year.

"My darling wife, have I not always told you these silky night dresses, you spend so much money on, are a waste? I only enjoy them for five minutes before I want you out of them. Take it off." she said quite seriously.

Lotty melted at her spouse's firm tone. Although in day to day life, Poni revelled in catering to her wife's every need and wish, they both knew that the bedroom was Poni's kingdom and domain. It had been so since the very beginnings of their relationship. This was the way Lotty wanted it and melted under her spouse's masterful touch, but for once, tonight would have to be different.

"Poni as much as I want to, I can't, I really need to finish these instructions for Mrs Mcklusey. Beth asked me to come up with ideas for the food for the reception. It needs to be posted by tomorrow. Please Poni? You know I need you always, but I need to get this finished. I promise I'll make it up to you." She said seductively and ran her tongue around Poni's lips.

"I will be your willing slave my love."

Poni gulped, looked deeply into her wife's eyes and said.

"Fine but you can guarantee I'm going to collect with interest my little piglet."

"Thank you my love." Lotty said pushing her spouse to one side.

Poni threw herself down on her side of the bed in a huff.

"Fine! I'll just read my book while you're so caught up in other business, that you can't give your beloved some attention."

Not taking it in the way it was intended, Lotty said. "Oh thank you my love, now I wonder chicken or beef?"

Poni grabbed her book and tried to read. Sometime later Lotty said.

"So tell me how you got on at the tailors. You did promise." reminded Lotty.

"I thought you were too busy for me?"

"Oh Poni, don't be a baby, I can listen and write. Now tell me." She demanded.

Poni sighed. "We got on well, choose some fine material and got measured up. That's about it really."

"You're a mine of information my love." Lotty said sarcastically.

"Oh, we did come up with one idea that I didn't tell you about. I'm taking Alex out for a stag night, next Friday. I'm booking one of back rooms for a poker night with some of our friends. Cigars, fine whiskey....."

"You better not add in the words 'fine women' to that sentence, if you know what's good for you!"

"Please! As if we would have eyes for anyone else." Poni kissed her wife on the head in reassurance.

*So you think you two can have all the fun! Well think again Poni boy!*

"Well I may as well hold Beth's hen night the same day." She waited for the reaction she knew was coming and on cue she felt Poni turn round.

"Hen night? We thought you'd maybe have a few people round here, for drinks and nibbles."

"Oh you did? Did you? Well I think it would be much more fun to take Beth out and paint the town red."

Poni's face looked a little concerned now. "Unaccompanied?"

"Of course unaccompanied, were not children. Alex and you seem quite capable of going out on your own, and we are all women when it comes down to it."

"Darling, we may all be women, but we are very different. There is a huge difference between Alex and I being attacked in the streets than you and Beth. You must admit that."

"So the streets of London are full of attackers now are they?"

Lotty sat up against the headboard of the bed, arms crossed across her chest, the beginnings of a huff spreading over her face.

*Oh no! Unhappy wife means unhappy Poni!* She thought. She sat up and turned to Lotty.

"No, it's not full of attackers, but you know you live in a very insulated world piglet. If you're out on your own, it's during the day; shopping and you have Robson with you. In the evening you have me with you."

"Well it's not like we're going to some strip club in Soho! I haven't even thought where we will go yet and Robson will take us there and take us home, so we'll hardly be on our own."

"Look, think about where you would like to go and we can discuss it, I know Alex will be of the same mind as me, if not worse, you know how she is with Beth. You always get your own way and what you want Lotty, but this is one occasion that I will put my foot down, it's my job to protect you and that's what I will do, whether you like it or not." Poni said firmly.

Lotty threw herself onto her side dramatically, usually they slept curled up together so Poni knew she was in trouble.

*Oh dear! I'm in the bad books I think.* thought Poni.

"Goodnight piglet, I love you." Poni said trying to build fences.

"Night." Lotty said curtly.

*Good luck with Beth old friend.* She thought.

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The next morning, Beth was sat at her desk on the telephone.

"That sounds fabulous Lotty, we should invite Jo as well, and she would love it!"

"I will, but remember, don't take any nonsense from Alex, I've already had it from Poni, but I think this is an excellent compromise."

Lotty had phoned Beth to tell her about the hen night idea. She had come up for the compromise that they would have a girls night for invited guests in the main room of the Alley Cat, with dinner then entertainment, while Alex and Poni enjoyed their poker evening in the back games room. Lotty had warned Poni, though that this concession of venue was only on the understanding that neither of them would venture out to Beth's event. Poni had readily agreed to those terms after suffering the cold shoulder, through a full night and through breakfast.

"I'm going to speak to a theatrical agent today and get some entertainment booked and you can be sure that pair of buffoons won't approve, but that's what Poni gets for daring to put her foot down with me!" Lotty said, clearly still miffed with her spouse.

Beth giggled and said. "I can't wait! I've never had a party before."

"You will have a wonderful time, no expense will be spared. Now we're meeting tomorrow for the final fitting yes?"

"Yes, ten O'clock." replied Beth.

"I'll pick you up as usual and if you don't mind accompanying me after to Harrods's?"

"Of course; shopping for something special?"

"Yes, Poni doesn't know it yet, but she's buying me something rather expensive!" The two women giggled.

"I feel sorry for poor Poni sometimes!" Beth laughed.

"I know, she is a darling really, but let this be a lesson for married life, let them think they can put their foot down every so often then the rest of the time you'll find them quite malleable."

"Poni hasn't got a chance has she?" Beth joked.

"Not a one, but she loves it that way! Well I'll see you tomorrow. Goodbye Beth."

"Goodbye Lotty."

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Alex sat at her desk, listening to Beth giggle while on the phone to her friend Lotty.

She was waiting for the inevitable knock on the door from Beth, after she finished their telephone call.

Poni contacted her first thing this morning, to give her advance warning of the upcoming situation, and although her initial reaction was the same as Poni's, the compromise Lotty had suggested seemed fair, and she dammed if she was going to be given the cold shoulder like Poni had been.

*Dear God Dalton! What's happened to you? You've gone from a moody, bad tempered womaniser to an engaged person who's under the thumb!* She chastised herself, but felt a smile on her lips and warmth in her heart.

*And I love it!*

She thought.

She heard the knock.

"Come."

Beth entered her office with an excited look on her face.

"Alex, Lotty is organising a hen party for me at the Alley Cat! I've never had a party before, I'm so excited!"

Alex smiled, pushed her chair back from the desk a little and patted her lap, indicating for Beth to sit.

She smiled, walked over, sat and out her arms round Alex's neck.

"That sounds smashing little bit." Alex pulled her down for a quick kiss.

When they pulled away Beth said. "Are you sure you're alright with this?"

"Of course, sweetheart. Why wouldn't I be?" Alex acted all innocence.

"Well, it's just Poni wasn't too happy about it, I understand."

"Oh really, I can't imagine why?" she smirked at Beth.

Her beloved smacked her on the arm. "Oh, Alex! You know all about it don't you?"

Alex laughed. "Yes, Poni telephoned this morning. No, honestly, I wouldn't have liked the pair of you gallivanting around London alone, but this party at the Alley Cat, while were there, sounds fine. I want you to enjoy yourself little bit, but we'll be there if needed."

Beth stroked the back of Alex's hair; she loved the feel of her short locks and strong neck.

"You have to promise that you won't interfere in our evening darling."

"Would I?" asked Alex innocently.

Beth leaned into Alex and with their lips only inches apart, Alex's lip parted in anticipation of a kiss.

"Oh you know you would my lord." Beth said seductively. She didn't follow through with the kiss, but ran the tip of her tongue round her lips. Beth was teasing Alex and she knew it. She secretly loved this small bit of power she held over the big woman.

When Alex heard those words and the wanton teasing look on her fiancée's face, it was like a bolt of lust shot straight to her groin. Alex Dalton had been a woman used to getting sex whenever she wanted it, but when she met Beth she changed; she wanted it to be different this time. They both



wanted to wait till their marriage, but wanting to do the right thing didn't make it any easier. She had been at boiling point for weeks, and the wedding was still three weeks away.

Beth had tipped her control over the edge. Alex pressed her lips against Beth's and took her mouth roughly, forcing her tongue inside the girl's mouth. In one swift movement she stood, lifting Beth with her and placing her on top of her desk. Beth's face looked a little shocked at the outcome of her teasing as Alex pulled her by the hips to the edge of the desk. The tall woman was stood between her legs, leaning over her body, Beth's skirt had ridden up to her hips. When Alex's mouth left hers it then went to work on her young Fiancé's neck. Beth's initial wide eyed look of shock was turning to lust. She loved it when Alex was forceful with her, but at the back of her mind was their promise to wait until they were married.

Alex seemed to be lost in lust as she had one hand, squeezing Beth's right breast and the other under her skirt gripping her upper thigh.

"Alex...Alex.....remember what we said." she moaned.

She felt a flood of wetness when Alex's hand came round to the front of her thigh and graze her mound.

Although she desperately wanted Alex to take her, she didn't want her first time to be on a desk when they were only weeks away from the wedding.

"Alex! Alex!" Beth smacked her on the side of the head. Alex was pulled from her lustful attentions and realised how far she had gone and where her hands were. She lifted her head and looked down into Beth's worried face.

If she wanted she could have taken her, could have seduced her into thinking it was a good idea, so easily. She looked at the ample bosom underneath her and saw how Beth's nipples stood erect waiting for her attentions. Her mouth watered at the thought of taking those nipples into her mouth, biting and teasing. It would be so easy, but then reality hit home and she remembered all they had talked about and how Alex wanted to do things in a respectable manner this time.

She gripped her fiancée under the chin, looked into her eyes quite seriously and said.

"You have to be careful when you play with fire little bit, you might end up getting burned."

Beth gulped. Alex broke out in a smile, thinking she had tortured her beloved enough.

"But I warn you in only a matter of weeks from now, I won't stop and I may never let you out of bed for our entire honeymoon."

Beth smiled up at her and looked up at Alex's handsome face. "I love you so much my lord and I look forward to you confining me to our marriage bed. Lord Alex Dalton, you are an animal!"

Alex gave her a final kiss in the lips and said. "Only for you, little bit, only for you. Now how about doing some accounts to cool us down?"

"Sounds about right, I'll go and get them."

"They both stood up and straightened their clothing. As Beth walked out the door towards the filing cabinets, she turned and said.

"Oh by the way darling, when were married can we revisit that position?"

"What the desk?" Alex asked.

"Hmm. I have a fantasy about you taking me on top of the desk in your study."

Alex simply put her head in her hands and said.

"Oh please God, give me strength! Please sweetheart, get the accounts before my head explodes!" Alex said exasperated.

Beth laughed. "Yes my lord!" She said. Giving a curtsy.

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Poni saw a lot less of her wife over the next week, as she was preparing the celebrations of all celebrations for Beth's hen party.

Although they were going to the same place for the evening, it had been decided much to their partner's annoyance, that the couples would travel separately from their respective mates to the stag and hen nights at the Alley Cat.

The two friends were sitting in the back of a taxi, since the ladies took the car and Robson with them.

Alex nervously fingered her tight collar and bow tie as they set off for the club.

"Alex, would you please settle down! You're making me nervous. Were supposed to enjoying a night of cards, good company and no fussing women! But you're doing enough for both of them." Poni had organised a dinner in one of the private rooms with some of their closest acquaintances then they would move to the casino room, the Alley Cat kept very quiet about. It contained poker tables, black jack, roulettes and other sorts of similar games.

"I just worry about her, she's very new to this world and you know how the sharks circle around any new blood in the main room." Alex said anxiously.

"Old man, most of the said sharks will be with us in the casino room and even if that's not the case I'm quite sure my wife can bat off any potential suitors, she can swing that handbag like a cricket bat! And my dear Lord Dalton, I think you've made it quite clear, in our circle that Miss Elizabeth Bentley is strictly off limits. Honestly you're as territorial as a wolf Alex."

"I waited long enough for this happiness my friend, now I have it, I will allow nothing and no one to get in my way." Alex said very seriously.

"Lighten up my lord. This is supposed to be your last big night as a free woman. Were only a few doors away from them."

"I know, you're right. I hope you brought plenty of money Poni, because I'm going to take it off you!" Alex goaded her.

"We'll see, you may have gotten the best of me the past few times but I think my lucks turning. I tell you one thing, I'll be glad when you two finally get married, then I might get my wife back." Poni grumbled.

"What do you mean?"

"The last few weeks we've hardly seen each other. She's been here there and everywhere, meeting people with Beth, making endless lists, honestly you would think it was the royal wedding!"

Alex laughed. "Aw, is poor Poni being neglected?"

"Well not for long. She doesn't know it yet, but when you two are off on your honeymoon, I have booked us a little romantic getaway in Paris. I may not let Lotty out of the hotel."

"I know how you feel old friend; this long period of abstinence may be the death of me before we get to the wedding day! But, she's so worth it. Come on were here."

They stepped out o the taxi at the Alley Cat. Poni paid the driver as Alex led the way in.

"Let's go win some money!" Alex declared.

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"You ready to have fun my dear?" said Lotty, as she grabbed her clutch bag.

Alex had dropped her off at Poni's, in a taxi earlier, as the two ladies were leaving from there to head to the club.

"Yes, all ready. Do I look alright do you think?"

Lotty looked over the young girl who was wearing an iridescent purple blue sharkskin dress with a strapless boned bodice. It was simply stunning.

"My dear, the others will be walking around with their tongues hanging out. You look beautiful." Lotty herself was wearing a long velvet evening dress that clung to her curves. It was also strapless but around the top of the bodice was a thick edging of white material.

"Thank you, you look very elegant yourself Lotty." Beth said.

"Why thank you. Now let's go. We have a lot to get through tonight."

Lotty's servants helped them on with their shrugs and they made their way out to the car.

"Evening Robson."

"Evening ma'am, Miss." Robson said doffing his cap.

"What's in store for me tonight then?" Beth asked her friend.

"A little dinner, lots of champagne and the rest well, you'll just have to wait and see!"

"Spoil sport!"

They were soon at the club and as Robson helped them out of the car, the door normally kept tight shut so as to assure discretion, opened up and Jack the doorman welcomed them in. Alex had apparently asked him to watch out for the two ladies.

"Evening ladies."

"Good evening Jack. Is everything as I requested?" asked Lotty.

"Exactly as you wished. Let me escort you to the dining room."

Unlike Alex and Poni who were dining in a private room, Poni and Beth were eating in the main dining room. Lotty had invited some of her acquaintances to dine and spend the evening with them.

Jack opened the doors to the main room. Beth gasped. "Oh Lotty, its lovely!"

The main room that consisted of the bar seating area, dance floor and stage were decorated with balloons, bunting and crepe paper ceiling decorations.

"I hope you like it. I wanted it to be perfect." Lotty was delighted with the outcome of her planning.

"It's wonderful. Truly, you are such a good friend." said Beth.

"We're going to eat first, then come through here for some cocktails and entertainment. Lead on Jack." ordered Lotty.

When they entered the dining room, which was just off the main room, the tables were full of ladies mostly like themselves, who gave her a round of applause.

They were shown to their table which already had champagne chilling in an ice bucket. Jo was already sat there waiting for them.

"Good to see you. I'm so glad you could come, Jo." said Beth as she bent to kiss her on the cheek.

"I wouldn't miss it. I've been so looking forward to it."

Beth sat, but Lotty remained standing. She took up her knife and knocked against her glass, getting the attention of the room.

"Ladies, I want to thank you for coming along this evening and making this a night to remember for our friend Beth Bentley."

While Lotty was speaking, the waiters went round the tables filling up the champagne flutes.

"I ask you to raise your glasses to, a young woman who, has fought the brave fight and slain the heart of our noble Lord Dalton."

Beth laughed and looked down at her friend. "Beth, my young friend, you have done what no other has done before you and won the love of a very special person, and for that you have our deepest admiration. Ladies, I give you Elizabeth Bentley!"

The rest of the ladies joined in. "Elizabeth Bentley!"

"Thank you. Thank you everyone." said Beth shyly.

"Enjoy your meal ladies." said Lotty to the assembled group.

"I've put together a special menu with the chef. I hope you enjoy it. Then were having a selection of cocktails. Jack? Feel free to begin." Lotty said.

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"Black nineteen." called the croupier.

"You won again, you old swine! And you're not even concentrating on the game." said Poni exasperated.

They had a splendid meal, among friends then retired to the gaming rooms with drinks and cigars.

"I just hate the fact that I'm in here and she's out there, without me."

"You're behaving like a love struck fool, Alex. You'll soon be with her twenty four hours a day. Enjoy your freedom while you have it." advised Poni.

"I have had my fill of freedom old friend. I can't wait to have that ball and chain locked round my leg." She joked.

"It does have its advantages." Poni smiled with a wistful look on her face.

"Poni! Alex! Great little shindig!"

"George. Glad you good make it." Poni sighed.

Georgina Faversham was the middle aged daughter and heir to her father's Biscuit Empire.

Ever the gracious host, Alex stood to shake her hand and observed the even more rotund figure than usual.

George was short 5th 3 inches if that. She had greying shoulder length hair that had seen a little too much hair cream and a round portly body. Although she needed glasses, her vanity only allowed her to use a monocle.

She had always had an eye for the young ladies and despite her appearance and growing years, she used her apparent wealth to make sure she always had a young lady on her arm. Alex did know something however, that the young ladies did not. Her father's business had been declining over the years and he put a stop to her extravagant spending, much to his daughter's annoyance. Once the said young ladies found this out they inevitably moved on. Tonight though she had come up trumps again, for Alex smirked at Poni when they observed the platinum blonde lady hanging off her arm.

"George nice of you to come along, did you get a drink? It's on me this evening."

"We did indeed Alex, and I wouldn't have missed this for the world. A party to celebrate Alex Dalton having her wings clipped! Ha, ha! Wouldn't miss it, would we my lovely?" George turned to the girl on her arm.

Alex scowled at that last comment.

"Course not Georgie!" The girl said in a rather coarse East end accent.

"Introduce us to your lady friend Georgie!" Alex said with a straight face. Poni covered her mouth to hold in her laugh.

"How remiss of me, may I introduce my companion Rosie."

"Ruby!" The girl interrupted.

"Ah, yes of course, Ruby."

"You the poor sod that's getting' hitched?" She asked Alex and, by the looks of the way she was undressing her with her eyes, hoping she wasn't, clearly not too impressed with her current companion.

"That would be me, yes." young Ruby's eyes then lingered on Poni and she licked her lips.

"Ruby Smith and you are?" She asked Poni, holding her hand out looking for a kiss on the back of her hand.

Alex sniggered at Poni's predicament.

"Poni Woodward, Miss. Smith and like my good friend, taken and happily married." She said firmly, nipping any interest in the bud.

Ruby looked disappointed and said to George. "Can we go through to the other room now? I'd love to see that music hall act."

"Music hall act?" asked Alex.

George sensed this might not go over too well and would take great enjoyment in telling Alex the news.

"Yes, it's the talk of the club; it seems your wife Poni has convinced the agent of Billy Boyd, to allow her to play the private party for a Miss Beth Bentley." George took great delight in telling Alex this as she knew her bad temper was legendary, but Alex remained outwardly calm, simply lighting a cigarette, inhaling and then blowing the smoke right into George's face.

"Well nice seeing Georgie. Do enjoy the rest of the evening." Turning to Poni she said. How about trying a little black jack?" Poni nodded and they left to join the game. As they walked throughout the smoke filled room, Alex caught the attention of a waiter.

"Yes, Lord Dalton?"

"Could you ask Jack to come and see me please, oh and two large whiskeys."

Poni looked a little worried at the new turn of events.

"Alex, why don't we take a little seat for a bit?"

Alex nodded and they sat in the big leather arm chairs over by the fireplace in the room.

"Now, I don't want you to over react. I'm sure she'll behave herself."

"I won't overreact." Alex said unconvincingly.

The waiter returned with their whiskeys.

"Jack will be with you shortly m'lord. Would you like the cigars brought over?" Said the waiter.

"I'm fine with a cigarette. Poni?"

"Not for me." She said taking out her cigarettes.

"So Billy Boyd is going to be in that room next door." Alex mulled over the situation.

Billy Boyd was the stage name for music hall star Jane Boyd. She was one of the richest stars in music hall and a well known womaniser. They had been in each other's company and competed for the same women in Alex's younger days. While Alex had the upper class charm, Billy had the East end cheeky boy down pat.

"Billy Boyd will be in that room next door singing love songs to my fiancée?"

"It's just a bit of fun and we both promised we wouldn't go through there. You need to show a bit of trust."

"I'm not going through. Don't worry."

Just then, Jack arrived at their side.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. You finished on the door for the night?"

"Yeah everyone's in that's coming in."

"Good. I want you to do me a little favour. Can you stay in the main room and keep an eye on our ladies? Let me know if there's anything concerning going on. Any unwanted attention."

"You expecting trouble my Lord?"

"No, not really, we just promised to keep our distance, but I like to have eyes and ears everywhere." She said peeling off a few notes from her wallet and giving them to Jack.

"Of course. You just relax. I'll make sure everything's as it should be." Jack set off for the main room.

"Was that really necessary?" asked Poni.

Alex smiled, rubbed her hands together and said. "Now we can enjoy some blackjack. Shall we?"

"Lead on My Lord!" Poni saluted jokingly.

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In the main room, the party was in full swing. The three women and their party had finished dinner and were now seated in the main room, enjoying their fourth cocktail. The giggling from the table was becoming louder.

"Lotty, I think I better slow down on the cocktails!" said Beth.

"Nothing of the sort! We're having fun. Cheers! So Jo, see anyone that catches your eye?" The two women had made it their mission to find someone nice for Jo but she wasn't really helping.

"No, none fits my bill so far. Still, most that are my type are in the gaming rooms with Alex and Poni." Jo said.

"There is such a thing as being too picky you know." suggested Lotty.

"I'm not picky, I just have high standards. I want to find the one, like you two."

"Quite right Jo, keep your standards high. You deserve the best. Maybe you'll meet someone at the wedding?"

Jo smiled. "Perhaps. So when are you going down to Dencotte?"

"A week before, just to get all the final things sorted and to relax before the big day. I still haven't seen the whole estate. I plan to explore all its nooks and crannies. Will you still come down two days before Jo?" asked Beth.

"Of course, I want to get your dress hung up, to get the creases out, and make any last minute adjustments."

Beth smiled. She was delighted they had met the young woman. She was so talented and had become firm friends with Lotty and herself over the weeks.

"Oh! Looks like our entertainment may be ready." Lotty said as she saw the band take their places.

Lotty was excited she had managed to persuade the famous music hall act to appear at their little party. Billy Boyd was the best in the country and had performed all over America as well. Lotty had offered a king's ransom to try to engage her services, but little did she know that Billy had agreed to perform, because she heard it was for the fiancée of Alex Dalton. The chance to cause some mischief was too much to pass up.

The three women watched as the lights went down and the noise from the ladies in the built louder and louder.

Then a woman, in long evening dress came into a spotlight on the left hand side of the stage. The band began to play and the singer started singing the popular song Mad about the Boy.

The rest of the stage was in darkness and all you could see was the singer surrounded by the thick Smokey atmosphere.

*Mad about the boy*

*I know it's stupid to be mad about the boy*

*I'm so ashamed of it but must admit the sleepless nights I've had*

*About the boy*

After she finished the first verse, a spotlight came on, lighting up one small area of the bright hand side of the stage. There stood a young man, leaning against a lamp post, smoking a cigarette. He was dressed in the style of American young men of the time. Blue jeans, turned up at the bottom. Black leather jacket zipped half way up so you could just see the pure white t shirt underneath. His hair was combed into the duck tail style.

The young man stood quite still, not looking at the audience, blowing his cigarette smoke into the air.

The singer continued and the tension in the room grew, as the women lusted after this cool girl/boy.

*On the silver screen*

*He melts my foolish heart in every single scene*

*Although I'm quite aware that here and there are traces of the cad*

*About the boy*

*Lord knows I'm not a fool girl*

*I really shouldn't care*

*Lord knows I'm not a school girl*

*In the fury of her first affair*

He hadn't moved all this time then suddenly, he coolly turned his head and pinned the sexiest, Smokey look to the audience.

There were some screams from the audience as the women got more excited.

He slinked to the side of the stage, every movement planned for the sexual effect it would have.

A feminine woman, obviously part of the act, walked across the stage and was stalked by this dangerous looking young man.

The woman was playing hard to get and the young man acting the seducer.

Beth looked over at her two friends open mouthed. Lotty just smiled, winked and mouthed the word enjoy.

Beth had to admit the performance was very sexy and seductive. This young male impersonator was very different to her beloved. Where Alex was all sharp suits and power, this young man had a youthful charm. Just like the boys she had seen in the American pictures. If she was to compare them to real men she would say that Alex was more a man and Billy was more of a boy. A cheeky one at that.

*Will it ever cloy*

*This odd diversity of misery and joy*

*I'm feeling quite insane and young again*

*And all because I'm mad about the boy*

The young man had captured his quarry by now and was dancing her in a sultry fashion across the stage.

*So if I could employ*

*A little magic that will finally destroy*

*This dream that pains me and enchains me*

*But I can't because I'm mad...*

*I'm mad about the boy*

In the lead up to the final line, the young man had become close to kissing the girl. Just as his lips were inches away from hers, he turned to the audience, winked and kissed his girl. The stage lights went black and the crowd of women went wild.

The lights came up and the young man came up and to the microphone and said. "Good evening ladies. My names Billy Boyd and were here tonight to celebrate a pretty girl's last night of freedom. Let's hear it for Miss Elizabeth Bentley!"

While Billy got set up at the piano for the next song Beth said.

"Wow! Where did you find her Lotty?"

"Have you never heard of Billy Boyd? She's a famous music hall male impersonator."

"And famous womaniser!" Jo added.

"She's very good looking though, you must admit, she has every girl in London after her. Not your type Jo?"

"She's the type that knows she's good looking and a bit too pleased with herself. All mouth and no trousers, if you ask me."

Beth and Lotty smirked at Each other. Lotty leaned over to Beth and whispered.

"The lady doth protest too much, me thinks!" Beth nodded knowingly.

"My next song is a bit of advice to our new bride. Follow these interactions and you won't go far wrong." Billy started the first bars of a slow ballad.

*Girls were made to take care of boys*

*To be kind and dutiful*

*Hmmm...*

*Girls were made to take care of boys*

*Made to share their sorrows*

*Made to share their joys*

*Made to help and guide them*

*With ever a patient hand*

*Made to give affection*

*In the right direction*

*(Always understand)*

*Now boys may think they take care of girls*

*Just because they pass on their fashions and their curls*

*But I've always found*

*It's just the other way around*

*(Other way around)*

*If you need the girl*

*And declare you do*

*(Tell her that you need her)*

*She'll be there*

*To take care of you*

*(She'll be there)*

*(Now boys may think they take care of girls*

*Just because they're clever with their fashions and their curls)*

*But I've always found*

*It's just the other way around*

At the end the three women laughed and clapped loudly with the rest of the room. Billy Boyd was going down a storm.

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The noise of the clapping and cheering could be heard in the games room. Long since abandoning the gaming tables, they had moved on to snooker. Alex was smoking like a chimney, her annoyance rising as the noise from the other room rose.

"Poni, can you tell me what's so appealing about a scruffy little oik who looks like a garage mechanic singing sappy love songs?"

Poni smiled. "I don't know old man, the world is changing and it seems we are getting old. Ladies seem to like anything they see in the American films. They find it exotic. I know you both were competitive when you were out together, but I don't think she would purposely try to hurt you."

"I hope not." Alex smashed her shot in the corner pocket.

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The show had gone down a storm. The women had enjoyed lots more drinks and Billy had sung some comedy songs and ballads. When the show ended and the lights came up Beth said.

"Thank you so much Lotty that was wonderful. Truly, thank you for doing this for me."

"What are friends for my dear? Jo have you enjoyed it?" Lotty asked.

"It's been wonderful, thank you for inviting me. I don't have that many friends in 'this' side of my life."

"Well you have two good ones now." said Lotty.

Beth was feeling a little drunk and was starting to miss Alex. It clearly showed on her face, because Lotty asked. "What's wrong my dear?"

"Oh I was just wondering how Alex and Poni were getting on. I miss her I suppose."

Lotty and Jo smiled at the sweetness of the statement.

"You know what? I think they have had eyes and ears in this room the whole night." Lotty said.

"What do you mean?" Beth asked.

"Do you see Jack?" she pointed over to the bar.

"Yes. Why?"

"He has sat there the whole evening pretending he wasn't looking over here. I'll wager that our good for nothing partners, not wanting to appear as if they were going against our wishes, slipped him a few pounds to keep an eye on us. Although what danger we could be sitting in here I don't know."

"I think you could be right. Well how about this. Since they have at least pretended to abide by our wishes, how about we send for them and have a dance before we go?"

"Sounds smashing. Waiter!" called Lotty.

"Yes, Mrs Woodward?"

"Would you be so kind and ask Jack to come over please."

"Certainly. I won't be a minute."

As he left a figure approached their table. The three women looked up to see Billy Boyd standing before them.

After the show ended she had a very quick change of t shirt and splash of aftershave before making her way over to their table.

She stood before them sans leather jacket.

"Evening ladies. I hope you enjoyed the show. Lotty long time since I've seen you out at the halls. That old Poni keep you locked up?" She took Lotty's hand and kissed it.

"Only when I let her. Billy! Good to see you again. Let me introduce my friends. Elizabeth Bentley and Josephine Stafford."

She kissed each hand in turn and said. "So you're the one that's managed to snare old Alex eh? That some feat you know." She said cheekily.

"I know and please call me Beth." She smiled broadly at the charming Billy.

She turned to Jo. *Wow!* Billy's heart thudded. She was well used to the company of beautiful women, but none had ever given her this feeling. When she looked at Jo for the first time, she was shaken to the core. The normally cheeky, full of bravado, and charming Billy Boyd was thrown off her stride. "Em.....Miss Stafford, a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"Charmed I'm sure." Jo said with a look of displeasure on her face. She couldn't stand these cocky types who thought they could have anyone and anything they set their sights on.

Billy was annoyed at Jo's look of disdain. She regained some of her normal composure, and was about to respond with a smart comment when Jack approached Lotty.

"You wanted to see me Mrs Woodward?" He eyed Billy suspiciously.

"Yes, since they've been so good could you ask Poni and Alex to join us for a drink?"

"Of course, right away." He quickly trotted away anxious to tell Alex of the young charmer making eyes at the ladies.

Billy's cocky persona was firmly back in place and said. "So, Beth would you do me the honour of a dance before that old crusty Lord locks you away at Dencotte?"

"Em...well..." She looked at Lotty for some guidance.

"Oh go on Beth, you're not jumping into bed with her!" Lotty joked.

Beth smiled, nodded and took Billy's outstretched hand and let herself be led onto the dance floor.

Beth felt a little dizzy from standing up so quickly. *I think I've had a little too much to drink!*

The band had struck up a slow tune and Billy pulled Beth towards her body. Beth saw that Billy had a smaller frame than either Alex or Poni, but did have quite a muscular body.

"So tell me princess, tell me your story how did you meet the stuffy Lord then?" Billy asked as she her hand lower on her back than was proper.

Beth giggled and grabbed the hand and pulled it up to the small of her back. "Princess? Is that the one you use on all the girls?"

"Ah I see. You not the usual blonde bit of fluff are you?"

"I hope not."

"Hmm. Well are you going to tell me?"

"Oh yes. I came down to London, was in need of a job and luckily enough Alex was in need of a secretary and the rest as they say is history."

"Em, the old secretary bit!" Could you take down a letter for me Miss Bentley, preferably on the desk?" She said saucily.

"Miss Boyd, it was nothing of the sort! Alex has been the perfect gentlemen I'll have you know!" Beth was miffed. It made her angry sometimes that people always judged Alex by her past.

"Hey sorry, am just avin a laugh with you. So you happy then?"

"The time I have spent with Alex has been the happiest of my life."



"I don't suppose I could convince you to have a final fling before the big day?" Billy smirked knowing what the answer would be before she asked.

Beth smiled, she knew Billy was harmless, all talk and no trousers as Jo had said.

"Not a chance Billy."

"I thought as much." Billy spun her partner under her arm.

"So how do you know Alex?" Beth asked.

"Oh we knocked about together at a few clubs over the years. Poni has always been settled with her old lady, but Alex and I liked the company of women and I suppose competed a bit. She had the title and the money though, an unfair head start if you ask me, but I had the youthful good looks and charm." Billy flashed a cheeky smile at first, but then was worried she had lumped Alex in it.

"But I've heard that she has left all that behind recently, you don't need to worry, am sure."

"I'm not. I know Alex inside out, I love her and she loves me, I never worry about that. She just needed to meet the right person, just like you will."

"Me? Never. There are too many pretty girls out there that need a piece of Billy Boyd!"

"You're a cheeky one but I promise you, someone will get through to that heart of yours."

Billy smiled and pulled Beth close to her again.

*Alex has found the right one this time. Lucky old Lord!* Billy thought.

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Alex and Poni had jumped as soon as Jack had relayed Lotty's message. They stepped into the main room just in time to see Billy Boyd, who was dancing a little too close to her fiancée, move her hand down onto her buttock. Poni put her hand on Alex's chest before she shot off onto the dance floor to Beth.

"She's just chancing her luck; you know what Billy is like? Give Beth a chance to handle it first."

Poni was right. No sooner than she had said it, they observed Beth grabbing the stray hand, pulling it up and then reprimanding her.

"Your right as always old friend, but Billy is skating on thin ice."

They made their way over to the ladies table.

"Poni!" Lotty jumped up and kissed her spouse.

"Darling, have you ladies had a good time?" She asked, taking Lotty into her arms. She could tell her wife was a little merry.

"Wonderful! It's been marvellous! But we've missed you and Alex."

"I bet." She said as she nuzzled into her wife's hair.

Alex had her eyes fixed on the dance floor. She took out yet another cigarette and lit it, inhaling deeply, she watched as Billy escorted Beth back to the table.

Alex met Beth's eyes with a steady gaze. Beth at first looked excited to see her then worried about being seen dancing with someone else.

Alex wanted to allay any fears and gave her a small smile and a wink. Beth ran towards her fiancé and threw her arms round Alex's neck. The older woman kissed her deeply, the kind of kiss that claimed Beth in front of everyone.

Billy, who was watching, knew well enough what it meant, mine. Back off.

"I missed you my lord."

"You too little bit. I see you've made a new friend?" Beth turned in her arms to face Billy. Alex kept a possessive arm around Beth's middle.

"Oh yes. Billy."

"Billy Boyd, as I live and breathe. I haven't seen you since I don't know when."

"Alex, good to see you." Billy put out her hand hoping Alex would shake it. She did and Billy relaxed a little. "Poni you too."

Poni shook her hand.

"From what I've heard Alex, with you settling down and all, I don't think we'll be out in the same places anymore."

"True. So you've been entertaining our ladies this evening?"

"Well it's a hard job, but someone's got to do it."

"I see you've dressed for the occasion." Alex said cheekily.

"Well the birds like it. They like young energetic lads not ageing stuffed shirts like you two!"

Billy bit back.

Alex felt the soothing strokes of Beth's hand on her back, which calmed her.

"I see you've met my girl then?"

"Yeah and very nice she is too."

Poni, Lotty and Jo didn't no whither this verbal jousting would end up in unpleasantness or laughter. The tension was palpable.

"Come, help me get the drinks and we'll catch up." Alex indicated over to the bar and walked away not giving Billy the option to decline.

When they arrived at the bar Alex said.

"Didn't take you long before you had my girl up on the dance floor." She signalled the bartender.

"It was just a dance. Honour dictates I have a little flirt with your girl, I knew it wouldn't go anywhere, she's a nice girl and I wouldn't do that to you, we've shared some good times. You would do the same."

"Perhaps. Good to see again." She turned, smiled and grasped Billy round the back of the neck, in an apparent hug. When her lips were next to Billy's ear she said in a very serious voice.

"If I see your hand on my girl's backside or any other part of her anatomy, apart from shaking her hand, I'll ring your scrawny neck Billy boy! We clear?"

"Crystal Alex."

Alex pulled away smiling, and patted Billy on the back. Now that little warning was over the atmosphere was now very friendly. Alex had drawn the line and Billy knew where she stood.

"So what will you have?" Alex asked as the batman waited for the order.

"I'll take a whiskey."

Alex turned to the barman. "Three whiskey's and three vodka martinis please."

"So I hear your doing very well Billy."

"Yeah, things are going well, good money, good women, the lonely housewives love me. I'm a boy without the threat of actually being a boy; they can kid themselves their not having an affair. Smoke?"

"Thanks." Alex took a cigarette. "You never get tired of all that? Their using you just as much as you're using them you know."

"What? You've decided to settle down so you're the expert on relationships all of a sudden? You were just the same as me if not worse."

"No, I think Poni's the expert on being settled. I was the same, and I was miserable. Beth has changed my life; she's brought me peace I never knew was possible."

"Don't you miss it though? The thrill of the chase, and the wining, the conquest?"

Alex smiled. "No I don't miss that but let me say this, Beth is very innocent and I am the first person she's been in a relationship with, so I am very much looking forward to my honeymoon!"

Billy slapped her on the shoulder and laughed. "So what's the story with the pretty girl who looks at me like I'm something nasty on her shoe?"

Alex laughed. "Oh Jo?" Billy nodded. "She's a fashion designer. She works at the fashion house where Beth is getting her wardrobe made. Lotty, Beth and Jo have become fast friends. She probably looks at you like that, because she's a nice respectable girl and you have the reputation of a cad."

"Well so did you!"

"Yes, but I'm a good boy now. Shall we?"

Alex grabbed the drinks tray and started towards their table followed by Billy.

The drinks were dished out and they took their seats, Billy sliding in beside Jo.

Beth turned and whispered to Alex "Everything alright darling?"

"Perfect sweetheart, we were just getting reacquainted and drawing some boundaries. Don't worry Billy's fine. What do you think of her?"

Beth smiled. "She's very arrogant and cheeky, but I think underneath all that bravado she's probably got a heart of gold. And probably like you needs to stop chasing the ladies so much."

"I think your right sweetheart."

"Billy would you like to come to our wedding?"

"Oh please do that would be jolly." said Lotty.

Jo rolled her eyes.

"Yes. I'd like that. The marriage of Alex Dalton is something I thought I'd never see so, to see it in the flesh would be a privilege." She inhaled her cigarette and stubbed it in the ash tray.

All but Alex sniggered at her comment.

"Do you think you'll manage to wear a suit?" She lifted her glass to her lips and almost as an afterthought said with a straight face. "Or a dress if you'd rather."

The table burst out laughing. Jo in particular found it highly amusing.

"I think you'd suit a pink flowery number, I could design it for you Billy, or will you be Jane?" Jo said.

Billy scowled as the five friends laughed at her expense.

*Why did I even think you were something special!*

"I'm more used to getting the birds out of them, but I expect you're so frigid you wouldn't know about that!" You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. Jo's face was enraged as she tried to think of a comeback. Instead she just grabbed her drink and looked away disgustedly.

Alex cleared her throat and said. "Well, shall we have one last dance as an engaged couple before we head off?"

"Yes darling let's do that." They stood and made for the floor.

"Shall we join them Lotty?" Poni asked.

She nodded and they joined the dance floor.

Billy and Jo looked at each other then Jo looked away quickly.

Looking over at Jo again, Billy rolled her eyes and made a decision she thought she might regret.

"Erm...would you like to dance?"

Jo snapped her head round at Billy. "Are you out of your mind? We clearly don't like each so you can just stop the usual chat up lines and that roguish charm that those silly girls seem to fall for, I'm not interested in an arrogant, music hall star, that thinks a bit too much of herself, and who leaves a trail of broken hearts behind her all in the name of a conquest and the thrill of the chase!"

Billy was astounded at this outburst. "You flatter yourself princess! I was only asking to be polite, since we are with friends. You are the last woman in here I would ask to dance! And as for the conquest, you aren't even worth the chase!"

Jo looked crushed. She jumped up and was about to make her way to the ladies, when she saw the platinum blonde that had been hanging on Georgina Faversham earlier.

"Try her. I'm sure she's more your style!" with that she marched off to the bathroom.

Billy smashed her hand down on the table, knocking over a glass then ran a hand through her dark brown hair.

She was furious. *Why I'm I letting that woman get to me like this! I've only just met her. She nothing to me.* Thought Billy.

Billy chased women and didn't get what she wanted but if that did happen then she would just move on to the next target. She never let a woman affect her that much. What was it about this woman that made her sad that Jo thought so badly of her?

*Well if that's what she expects of me then I'll give it to her!* She resolved.

She stood and grabbed the blonde woman heading for her. "Hay darlin! Were you looking for me?"

"Yeah, I love your show. My names Ruby, Ruby Smith. Do you think I could have your autograph?"

"I'll do better than that princess, let's dance first though eh?"

She pulled the woman onto the floor and into her arms as they began to dance cheek to cheek.

"Wait till I tell the girls I was dancing with Billy Boyd! They'll be so jealous!"

Billy wasn't even listening. Her anger from earlier was tying her guts in knots for some reason.

Billy lowered her hands onto Ruby's buttocks and squeezed her cheeks.

"Oh Billy!"

She lifted her eyes and caught Jo coming out of the ladies.

When Jo saw Billy, dancing with that woman, her hands all over her. She felt a jolt in her stomach and she felt disappointment. She couldn't understand why, she knew the type Billy was.

Their gazes locked.

Billy could actually feel the look of disgust on Jo's face and it made her feel foul.

*You are exactly what I thought you were Billy Boyd. Why does that make me sad?* Jo thought.

She averted her gaze and made for the table.

Alex, Beth, Poni and Lotty, who had been observing the interaction while dancing, looked at each other and shrugged.

"What's that all about darling?"

"I'm not sure, but I think there is more to animosity than meets the eye." said Alex.

"You don't think? Surely not. Jo can't stand her."

"We'll see, I'm glad I asked her down to the wedding now."

"Hmm." Beth yawned.

"I think we should be making tracks. We'll drop Jo at her flat. Come on."

"Alright."

Alex signalled to Jack who came over with their coats.

Billy saw them getting ready to leave and pushed Ruby away from her.

"That's enough, go and find Georgie. I'm sure she'll see you home."

Ruby threw her arms around Billy's neck.

"I thought you would want me to come home with you Billy? You promised me more than an autograph." She purred, in a seductive voice, into Billy's ear.

Billy grabbed her by the arms and said rather harshly. "Leave me alone. Alright?"

Ruby turned and ran away; Billy marched over to the bar. "Double whiskey." She lit a cigarette and when the whiskey arrived drained it in one gulp.

"Another." She demanded of the barman.

Alex watched the scene as Jack helped Beth and Jo with their coats.

"I'll just be a minute sweetheart." She approached Billy.

"What you disgusted with me too?" She asked Alex.

"I don't think anyone's told you their disgusted at you."

"I can see it in their eyes." She said dejectedly.

"Maybe it's more that some people demand more of you than others."

"What do you mean?"

"I've learned something since I've met Beth. Don't be what they expect of you. Demand more of yourself and life will be so much better for you. Don't be a fool all your life." Alex clapped her on the back.

"See you at the wedding. Come down the day before, were having a special meal that evening. Stay at the house with us."

"I can quite easily get a room at the hotel in the village."

"I know you can, but it would be nice to have all my friends together. I know we were a pair of jack the lads, but we had fun didn't we?"

Billy nodded. "We did."

"I'm so glad we met up again. I would like to count you as one of friends, I don't have many."

"I have even less." said Billy sadly.

"It's decided then. Beth and I leave the day after the wedding for our honeymoon, but Poni and Lotty are staying a few more days. You're welcome to join them. Get away from things for a bit. Get a bit of perspective."

Alex held her hand and shook Billy's hand. "I will then. Thank you. See you in a few weeks then."

"Excellent. Bye."

"Goodbye Alex."

She didn't know why she felt the need to help Billy; perhaps she didn't want to leave her behind in that life of empty encounters. She thought everyone should feel the happiness that she had discovered, and she knew that underneath the bravado, Billy was a good decent person.

She returned to her group of friends and they prepared to leave.

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It was the Sunday before the wedding, and Beth was on her hand and knees in her bedroom, packing her things into boxes, ready for the move to Dencotte.

She didn't really have much, but what she did have, was precious to her, the pictures of her parents, her mother's few possessions that had been passed on to her, jewellery which consisted of pearls, and cameo necklace. She also had copies of her father's books, not them all. She couldn't bring them all from home when she went to live with her aunt and uncle, just some of her favourites.

She felt butter flies in her stomach and was both excited and scared at setting out on her new life.

It was five days till the wedding, which would take place on Friday. They agreed that that they would travel down on Monday, so Beth was packing all they she could take, the rest would be sent on. Alex was to pick her up tomorrow morning and they would motor down to the estate. No matter



how much she wanted this and how happy she was, it was still a daunting move. As soon as she left her home with Agnes, her whole life would change.

She looked down at her beautiful engagement ring, it filled her with joy to see it on her finger each day, it represented her future, and she had nothing to fear anymore. She was loved and she belonged.

*Imagine! Little me mistress of such a great estate!* She thought.

Agnes came in with another box. "I found another in the cellar. It should do for some of your books. Some of the larger things could come down with me."

When they had told Agnes of their idea that she should take a cottage on the estate, she had been reluctant at first, not wanting to be taking charity or being a burden, but Alex convinced her that it would help Beth settle down into her new life if she had Agnes for company and to confide in.

Agnes had no ties in London, she had only moved there when she had inherited the house, so she accepted. The thought of being in a family environment in her later years did make her happy.

Alex's steward, Jones, had organised the renovating of a cottage on the estate, where Agnes would be very comfortable. Once she had sold her house, she would be able to live quite comfortably, although she had insisted on paying a nominal rent, even though Alex had said it was not necessary.

It was decided that she would move down once they came back from their honeymoon, with Alex's solicitors handling the sale of her house.

"I'm so glad you decided to come with us. You've become a very important part of my life Agnes."

"It will be nice to live in the country again; I never really took to London."

Beth picked up the book Lotty had given her. *Mrs Beeton's book of household management*.

"I think you'll be a great help to me Agnes, you've lived in country villages all your life. Did you know, the Lady of the manor is meant to be the chairwoman of committees that run the cottage hospital, the village school, the garden show, the village fete? Run a garden party for the people of the village every year and the charitable associations for the sick and the poor, church committees and I know not what? It's all a bit overwhelming."

"Yes, you will have a lot of responsibilities now, but don't worry there are women of the village that have been doing these things for years who will keep you right and especially as there hasn't been a lady of the house for so long, they would have been doing a lot more than they should have been. I'm sure they'll be glad of the help and you know I will be only too happy to get involved with village life. The house keeper, Mrs Mcklusey sounds a good woman as well; she'll help you along the way."

"Yes she is. I think you two will be good friends."

"We better get on or you'll never be ready for tomorrow."

Beth sighed then smiled at her friend. "You're right let's get to it!"

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The next day Alex and Poni had arranged to meet at the office to go over a few things before she went to pick up Beth.

In all Alex was taking a month off from work. They would be away on honeymoon for two weeks but she didn't just want to shoot off back to work as soon as they got back.

She had chosen a manager who worked at the foundation building to take up the reins and asked him to bring a secretary; they would both answer to Poni while she was away.

She unlocked the office and made some notes at her desk while waiting for Poni.

"Good morning My Lord! How are you this fine day?" Said her friend.

"Poni! Good to see you. I can't wait to get going and get Beth up to Dencotte, so we can finally start our life."

"You just want to get her all to yourself. So what's the timetable?" She sat down on the other side of the desk.

"Well we motor up today, get Beth settled in, I'm sure Mrs Mcklusey will have a hundred and one tasks for me to do. Hartnell are sending up Beth's new wardrobe on Wednesday, but the wedding dress is travelling up with Jo on Thursday. I think you and Lotty are arriving Thursday as well yes?"

"Yes that's right."

"Tommy and Billy will be arriving on Thursday as well, but I gave Tommy one of the cottage's so he can bring his associates. You know he never travels without Tiny and a few others.

All the other guests have made their own arrangements. I believe the village hotel is booked out."

"I think my wife's about as excited as you are. She and Mother have nattering on about it nonstop." Poni offered Alex a cigarette, they both lit up.

"It will be wonderful having Lady Grace there. She is the last link to my mother and father."

Lady Grace was Poni's Mother, and had been Alex's Mother's oldest friend. I just hope I don't foul this up. I've never done anything like this. My father could do it and you can do it. Will I?"

"Oh come on. How could you foul it up? You've only got eyes for the girl and you treat her like a princess."

"I can be grumpy and I have a dreadful temper."

"You never have a temper with her Alex. She can twist you round her little finger just like Lotty does me, and I haven't noticed you being grumpy since you got together with her."

"I hope I can do what's right by her. I plan to make her life as wonderful as possible."

Poni blew out smoke.

"When do you leave for the honeymoon?"

"We need to be at the docks for the Queen Elizabeth at two o'clock Saturday afternoon, and then she sails at three. It'll be an early start." she sighed.

"After a very late night you hope!" Poni laughed.

"Poni, let's just say I'm looking forward to the whole day." Alex smirked.

"So who did you get to stand in here?"

"Edmund Eastley. He's a steady reliable chap. He's bringing his own secretary."

"Eastley...hmmm...oh? Is that the deputy director over at the foundation building? The chap who gets very excited over percentage points at the board meetings?"

"That's him. You'll still come in three times a week won't you?"

"Of course I will. Don't you worry; I'll have this place running like clockwork. When are you going to tell Beth about New York?"

"Hmm. Tonight maybe. I hope she'll like it."

"Please! A luxury stateroom on the Queen Elizabeth; followed by a stay in New York? She'll love it. I hope you're taking your cheque book and a large wad of cash, Lotty spent a fortune there when we went. She tells me the stores are 'Simply Devine' Poni said in a high pitched voice.

Alex laughed. "Don't worry; she can shop to her heart's content. Were staying at the Waldorf."

"Nice. Oh I think that might be Eastley now." Poni turned as the door opened

A middle aged, silver haired man entered closely followed by his secretary. They seemed an odd combination Alex observed.

She was what you would call voluptuous. Large breasts, curvy hips and a skirt that was a little too tight around her bottom. Her wavy brown hair hung down to her shoulders and wore a little too much make up for Alex's tastes.

Poni whispered to Alex. "He certainly chooses his secretaries for their assets."

Alex elbowed her in the side.

They both stood and shook Edmunds hand.

"Lady Dalton, Ms Woodward, pleased to see you again. May I introduce my secretary Miss Shaw?"

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Shaw. This is Poni Woodward, my associate."

"I'm so pleased to meet you Lady Dalton, I've heard so much about you, and you Ms Woodward. Poni is such an unusual name, is there a story behind that?" Miss Shaw purred.

Poni looked at Alex nervously. "Eh...yes. Too long for just now."

"Eastley are you quite clear what your role will be here?" Alex asked.

"Yes. Certainly Lady Dalton."

"Keep an eye on the food ordering from each soup kitchen. We need to keep a control on costs; you have to keep your eyes peeled for what the kitchen managers are spending on food ordering. You might also get a call from my solicitors. The hospital at the foundation building is bursting at the seams so I ask them to find me a building for sale for expansion. If they call just take the details and I'll look at them when I get back. If you need access to the foundations accounts, then contact Poni, she has full authority. I think that's about all, anything you want to add Poni?" She said turning to her friend.

"Eh...only that I'll be in three times a week but don't hesitate to call me, if you need any guidance."

"Is there anything you'd like to add before I go?"

"Good luck for your wedding Lady Dalton, she's a lucky woman." said Miss Shaw.

"No. I'm the lucky one." Alex said happily.

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Alex had instructed her chauffeur, Alfie to drive up from Dencotte the day before so he could drive them down today, the Bentley having more room for Beth's luggage and boxes. They had made

very good time, after being waved off by Agnes, who Poni and Lotty were bringing up with them on Thursday. They were now being greeted by Mrs Mcklusey and Foster at the front entrance.

"You made good time m'lord." said Foster.

"Indeed we did, the roads were fairly clear. How goes the preparations?" Alex asked Mrs Mckluskey.

"Everything is under control don't you worry, but I will talk it all over with the new Mistress." Annie smiled.

"Oh, alright then." Alex noticed the clear shift in jurisdiction over household affairs and it secretly warmed her heart.

Welcome home Miss Beth." Beth took her hand.

*Home. 'Thought Beth. I really have found a home at last.*

"I'm delighted to be here." She beamed with happiness.

"Charlie, Samuel, help Alfie with the luggage." said Foster.

"Come in and we'll serve tea. You must be famished." Mrs Mcklusey said.

"Yes, starving."

Foster approached Alex. "Where do you wish us to put Miss Bentley's things m'lord?"

"If you just take it to the oriental room for the moment, then we'll have them moved to my bedroom after the wedding."

"Yes m'lord." They butler followed the two women into the house.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beth and Laura were going through Beth things, deciding which things to hang up, and which to leave stored until she was moved into Alex's room.

Beth would sort throughout the suitcases, and lay the things to be hung up or put away in drawers, and Laura would hang them.

"When does your new clothing come down from London Miss?"

"Wednesday. I can't wait to see it all finished. There are some beautiful things and a lot of things I'm not used to wearing; you will have to keep me right Laura."

"I'll try my best Miss." Laura beamed, excited by her new role.

Beth stopped trawling through her suitcase and turned to Laura.

"Are you happy with your new position with me? I never thought to ask. When Alex mentioned that I would need a ladies maid, I knew it could only be you. I trust you."

"Thank you for your kind words Miss. This new position is a big step up for me; normally it would go to someone a bit older. My family is very proud. I get a rise in wages and I get to go some travel with you and the Master."

"Travel? You know where I'm going on my honeymoon don't you! Please tell me?" She pleaded.

"I'm sorry Miss. I'm sworn to secrecy, but I think you will just enjoy it."

"Spoilsport." She pouted and Laura giggled.

They both turned as there was a knock at the door.

"Beth? Are you decent?" Alex's voice filtered throughout the door.

"Yes darling, come in."

The door opened and there stood Alex in her riding clothes. Black riding boots, brown jodhpurs, checked shirt with wool green tie, over that she had a brown waistcoat and tweed jacket. The outfit would be topped off with a brown flat cap, which at the moment was held under her arm, over her other arm she had a large bag of some sort.

Alex felt Beth's eyes caress her body from top to toe.

*Very dashing Alex!* Beth thought. *Hmmm. I can't wait till Friday!*

Beth walked over and kissed her Fiancé.

"What can we do for you darling?"

"Well, I thought before the rest of the week starts getting full of flowers, dresses and weddings, we could take a ride around the estate, so I can show you what you haven't seen yet. What do you think?"

"I would love to, but I've never ridden a horse in my life, and I haven't anything to wear."

"Well as to the first thing, I know you can't ride. That's why you'll ride up with me and for the second, I brought these for you." She handed Beth the large canvas bag she had brought with her.

Beth opened and began to pull out some jodhpurs and other riding gear.

"It was my Mother's riding things. I think they'll fit you; she had a similar petite build. Once we come back from our honeymoon I'll start to teach you to ride yourself and we'll get you your own things, but I hope these will do for the moment."

"Of course they will. Thank you for allowing me to wear your mother's things."

Alex gave a thoughtful look then said. "I'll let you get dressed then. I'll wait for you at the stables." She leant down and gave her a soft kiss, then left to allow the young woman to dress.

Beth pulled out all the clothes from the bag, looking a little perplexed. She then looked at up at Laura.

"I hope you know how to put all this together?" She smiled.

"Of course Miss. Let's get you dressed."

The two women giggled and laughed like school girls, putting the outfit together.

\*\*\*\*\*

Alex stood with her horse Skylla. She was stroking the horse's nose, as it whinnied in pleasure.

All around her the stables were all hustle and bustle, as the stable boys went about their work. Cleaning out stalls, taking horses out for exercise and mending tack.

"Good girl Skylla. Now I want you to be on your best behaviour today. You've met Beth before; remember she brought you out some apples when she visited the first time. Remember? She was nice."

The big horse whinnied as in response.

"Good girl. Well that woman is going to be my wife on Friday, and I want you two to get on. She's never been around horses before so we need to give a good impression so that she will want to learn, and that way we can all spend more time together. Alright?"

The horse snorted through its nostrils.

Alex scratched behind her ears. "Good girl."

"I'm ready My Lord." Alex turned to find Beth dressed in the riding gear. It consisted of a pair of figure hugging jodhpurs, black riding boots, cream blouse and short green jacket. Laura had pinned her blonde hair up out of the way.

Alex felt the heat rise in her body.

She looked simply delightful. Alex stroked her fiancée's cheek. "Is there anything you don't look good in little bit?"

"You like this?" She pointed to herself.

Alex simply nodded with a huge grin on her face.

"You my Lord are simply incorrigible!" She laughed.

"No doubt, only for you though sweetheart. But enough of this, we have places to go, people to see!"

Beth's gaze up toward Skylla, who was towering over her, and gulped.

"Emm...Alex don't you think we'll be too heavy for Skylla?" She sounded worried.

"Not at all, Skylla and I had a chat before you came out and she's looking forward to showing you around."

Beth smiled. "Oh did she now?"

"Of course, Skylla's been my horse since she was a foal and we communicate very well and besides, I'll hold you tight. Oh hang on.

She went over to the where some of the tack was hanging up.

"You better wear this riding hat. Come on, I promise I won't let you fall."

"John! Can you bring over the block?" She shouted to the young stable lad.

He marched over with a large block designed to help riders mount a horse.

"Ere you ar m'lord."

"Right I'll get up first then I'll pull you up while John helps you use the block. Now stand back sweetheart."

Alex didn't use the block; she simply put her booted foot in the stirrup and pulled herself up with ease. She reached her hand down ready to pull Beth up.

"Now stand on the block and John will help push you up."



Reluctantly she stood on the block and as John held her steady Alex pulled her up into the front part of the saddle quite easily.

"Oh it's very high, I feel a little dizzy." complained Beth.

Alex wrapped her arms around Beth's waist and took up the reins.

"Just relax, I've got you alright." Alex made a clicking noise with her mouth and they trotted off gently.

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They trotted slowly round the left hand side of the house, and then made their past the front. Beth looked over as the gravel turned to grass on the right hand side of the house, where the French doors came out onto the terrace area where Alex had proposed.

She was still wary of riding on Skylla and she sat ramrod straight, not daring to move.

Alex felt the tension in her body. She leant over and kissed her neck, whispering.

"Relax for me sweetheart. You'll be fine."

Beth felt a shiver run down her spine, at the touch of Alex's lips. She took a deep breath tried to relax a little.

As they rounded the right hand side of the house, she could see a swimming pool come into view, with tables and chairs around it. Further down she could see a fenced in tennis court.

"Wow, you have a swimming pool and a tennis court?"

"We have a swimming pool and tennis court little bit." She corrected.

"Sorry, it's hard to get used to."

"Do you like swimming?"

"Oh yes, very much, but I haven't had much chance of it over the years, I would love to have a go at tennis as well. Do you use the pool?"

"When I'm down in the summer months, it's very good exercise. I can't wait for you to see the estate in the summer, it's wonderful now, but in summer the colours and the woodland are just breathtaking. We can have lazy breakfasts and afternoon teas on the terrace, picnics at the lake and the stream, go boating." Alex said excitedly.

"Sounds wonderful darling. I can't believe all this is my home now."

"Well it is. All yours."

"Hmm." Beth cuddled in tighter to Alex.

"Have you ever had a dog Alex? I was surprised a country gent like yourself didn't have one trailing after you."

"I did, all the time I was growing up, I love dogs. My father had his own dogs and I had mine. We ran all over the estate together. After my last dog, Flash died, I had started work in London, and I didn't think it was fair to leave a dog here all week for the servants to take care of as well as the hunting hounds the estate keeps. What about you?"

"I haven't ever had one, always wanted one."

"Oh that's a shame. Well perhaps when we get back from honeymoon we should look into it." Alex said with a smile.

"Right let's get on. We can't cover every blade of grass, but I'll show you the highlights. Skylla's going to go a bit faster alright? But I won't let anything happen to you."

Beth just gulped and nodded. Alex turned Skylla away from the side of the fence and set off at a gallop towards woodland that began at the perimeter of the open grass land.

They didn't see the whole estate, but they gave it a pretty good try. They went through some of the woodland, meeting the gamekeeper and some forestry workers. Next they visited some of the farms, where they were invited in for tea and homemade cakes. Beth was delighted at how welcoming the locals were to her. They seemed genuinely delighted Alex had found someone.

Then the two inspected the rows of terrace houses and cottages inhabited by the estate workers.

Alex pointed out the renovations ongoing on the buildings.

"Were making sure all the accommodations have indoor plumbing, heating, things like that. We have to ensure the housing has the equal facilities to houses in the town. Jobs in rural areas are becoming scarce, and the younger generation are migrating to the town in hope of more jobs and better wages. If that happens, village life will die and I can't allow that to happen."

"I never thought of it that way. You have a bigger job here than I thought." said Beth.

"Yes. It's never ending. The next phase is to start building some new accommodations."

The residents were curious to meet the new Lady of the manor and extracted promises from her to attend committees for village shows, garden fetes and all manner of things.

"You're becoming very popular sweetheart." Alex joked.

"It seems I'll have a lot of work to do, when we come back from our honeymoon. I'm looking forward to being useful and helping you run the estate."

"I think the ladies are delighted to have someone of like mind for all these events, I sadly have never been very good at that sort of thing."

Beth laughed. "Yes, I can imagine your face, stuck in a committee talking about cake stalls and flower shows."

"Quite. Now I think it's time you met Mrs Roberts."

"Who's Mrs Roberts?" Beth said as they trotted down to the village.

"She's the postmistress and runs the village shop, and knows everything and everyone in the village and the county, it feels like! Once you've met her, everyone will know all about you. She is the biggest gossip in the county, but a nice woman. She's known me all my life."

They trotted down through the village, turning heads as they went. A lot of people doffed their cap as they trotted by. Beth could hear a lot of m'lord's and lord Dalton's as they passed by.

They rode into the village square. At the far corner was a pretty church and then both sides of the streets were lined with houses, buildings, and a smithy and finally she could see a post office.

Alex pulled stopped Skylla and jumped down.

"Sweetheart, just bring your leg round and slide down, I'll catch you." She raised her arms and beckoned to the nervous girl to come down.

Beth was scared, but she would rather be on solid ground, so she forced herself to swing her leg round, and while holding onto the saddle, slid her way down. She felt Alex's hands on her hips and sliding up her body. She felt her feet reach the ground and she turned to find Alex smirking.

"That worked out well for you, My Lord, didn't it?"

With a cheeky smile she said. "I have no idea what you mean! Let's go and meet Mrs Roberts."

Alex took her by the hand and pulled her into the shop. Beth looked around as they crossed the threshold. It wasn't large. There was a small rectangular floor space, and round the three sides of the space ran the shop counter. Behind there was shelving, which had all manner of goods on them. Tins, packets boxes, cigarettes and tobacco, breads and even children's toys. On the counter tops themselves there were cakes, special offers and other items. Off in the far corner counter there was a sectioned off area that had a metal grate in front and above was a sign saying 'Post Office.'

At the front counter, a grey haired woman, who had her hair up in a bun, and had little brown round glasses, was serving a woman at the till.

The grey haired woman looked up to see who had entered the shop, and suddenly a huge smile erupted onto her face.

"Lord Dalton! Get yourself over here and introduce your young friend." She called.

Alex took off her cap and walked over, still holding Beth's hand tightly.

"Mrs Roberts! I missed your lovely face, if I wasn't already engaged you'd be in trouble." Alex bantered with the old woman.

"I don't think so young Master. Well introduce your friend."

"Mrs Roberts, may I present my Fiancée Elizabeth Bentley."

Mrs Roberts reached over the counter to shake the girl's hand.

"Oh I'm so pleased to meet you at last, we've heard so much about you from Mrs Mckluskey up at the big house. Were so happy this young ruffian, has settled down at last."

"It's wonderful to meet you. I can't wait to get to know you all."

"I can't tell you how delighted we are that Dencotte will have a Lady of the Manor again. Our lord here has never been much good at helping organise village events, when you come back from honeymoon, I must get you to attend our sale of works committee."

"Mrs Roberts, my future wife has already been accosted by the ladies at the estate workers houses for committees, and we've still to visit the cottage hospital and the church. Try not to frighten my bride off before I get her down the aisle old woman!"

"Alex! It's quite alright." She said chastising her Fiancé. Then she turned to Mrs Roberts. "Don't listen to this one, I'll be delighted to help in any way I can."

"Oh don't worry my Miss Beth. I don't listen to anything this scallywag says. Do you know I caught her when she was eight, stealing apples from the vicarage orchard? Pulled her by the ear right up to her mother. We didn't see her in the village for two weeks after that!"

Beth giggled and laughed at the image of a young Alex being dragged by the ear.

"Alright, alright! I knew it was a mistake to come in here. I think we better move on to the cottage hospital."

Mrs Roberts took Beth's hand and said "Good luck for the wedding on Friday and rest assured, you are very welcome my dear."

"Thank you very much Mrs Roberts." Beth said.

After they left the post office, they visited the hospital and the church, where they promised to come for tea when they got back from their honeymoon. Alex thought that was quite enough for today and rode them back up to the house.

\*\*\*\*\*

That night, Alex and Beth sat eating dinner by the fire in the drawing room. It had seemed silly to them to sit at the larger table in the dining room, so Mrs Mckluskey set out supper on a small table by the fire.

Just as they finished, a young footman Beth didn't know, and Liz the maid, came in to clear the table.

"Hmmm. That was delicious; please send my compliments to Mrs Read Liz." Beth said.

"I will be sure to Miss Beth." She said smiling.

"Would you like coffee and port served here m'lord?" asked the tall, dark haired footman.

"We'll have it on the sofa William. Thank you." Replied Alex.

The servants retreated and the two made their way over to the sofa, by the fire.

"So that's William? There are so many servants to get to know. I wouldn't want to be impolite and not know who I'm talking to."

"You'll soon get to everyone sweetheart, once your around the house every day."

"I suppose. That dinner was delicious darling. There is such a difference between the food in town and the food here. Is it all made here?"

"Everything, apart from obvious things like the more exotic fruits and the like. We have a nice apple orchard and some of the things villagers have grown and we buy from them. The whole village is a little self contained industry." Explained Alex.

William came back with the coffee tray and set it out on the serving table in front of them; meanwhile Charlie was pouring Alex a glass of brandy, and Beth a small liqueur. He then brought over the drinks on a silver tray.

"Thank you." They both replied.

"Would you like a cigar this evening m'lord?" He asked, offering a silver box full of them, from the table.

"Yes. Thank you, Charlie. You don't mind the smoke so close to you sweetheart?"

"Oh no. I like the smell. It reminds me of my father." She smiled at Alex.

As the Charlie was about to leave the room, Alex called out. "Charlie, could you switch the big lights out? And that will be all. Tell foster to go ahead with the servants dinner, we'll ring if we need anything."

"Very good m'lord."

They were left in the big room, which was now quite dim, the only light coming from a couple of lamps, the fire and Alex's cigar.

Beth slipped her shoes off, brought her legs up on the sofa and cuddled in under Alex's arm, her head resting on her chest.

"This is so cosy. I much prefer this to those big formal dinners. Just you and I snuggling in."

Alex turned her head and kissed Beth. "I know little bit. We're going to have a life time of these nights now. Were nearly there, tomorrow your new clothes come from London, then Thursday all our friends arrive then your mine forever and you can't get away from me again!" Alex growled into Beth's ear playfully.

Beth laughed and said. "Well that's good, because I don't ever plan on leaving you, I promise. Now are you going to tell me about our honeymoon now?"

"Well since you asked so nicely and you promised never to leave me. Were going on the Queen Elizabeth bound for New York. We have the best suite on the ship, with rooms either side for Thomas and Laura to travel with us."

Beth through her arms round Alex. "Oh darling! America! I've always dreamed of travelling there. How wonderful! How long will it take us to get to New York?"

Alex's face was beaming with pride at being able to bring this sort of joy to Beth.

"The crossing takes us between 3and 4 days, when we arrive; we'll be staying at the Waldorf Astoria hotel."

"It just gets better and better. It'll just be like being in the American films! How long will we be away?"

"Three weeks. Once we get to New York I thought I could take you round the sites, go to a few clubs I know. We'll spend lots of money shopping. They have some great shops, I'm sure Lotty will tell you where the best ones are, the Woodward's have been a few times. We'll Travel back on the ship, and then I have a few weeks here to settle into married life. What do you think?"

"Alex Dalton, you always manage to take my breath away. I could never have imagined going on a trip like that."

"Do I get some kisses for that then?" Alex asked with a quirk of her eyebrow.

"Oh yes my lord! Many kisses. I love you." Beth leaned over to receive Alex's precious attentions.

Only the fire light illuminated the two dark figures lost in passion, lying together on the sofa.

\*\*\*\*\*

Thursday morning arrived and Beth was just leaving her bedroom to head downstairs for breakfast. Just as she reached the top landing she saw Alex coming from her own bedroom.

"Morning Darling!" She called down the hall.

Alex sped up her walk and took Beth in her arms, kissing her lips sweetly.

"Hmm. Morning sweetheart."

"I miss you so much at night, at least in London, when I stay, we sleep in the same bed, but I know it wouldn't be proper here in front of the servants."

"One day more little bit. One day and we'll sleep together for the rest of our lives. I promise. Come let's get breakfast, we've a busy day ahead."

They went down the stairs hand in hand and entered the breakfast room. The servants were laying out the food on the long serving table. Each dish of food was kept in silver salvers placed on top on heating trays, rectangular wire boxes with candles underneath; the system was to allow the family of the house to help themselves.

Alex sat down automatically at the head of the table and unfolded The Times newspaper.

Beth went over to the serving table.

"What would you like this morning, darling? Some of each?"

"Yes please. Pile it on. I'm starving, I worked in the gymnasium for two hours this morning, don't think I'll get much chance for the next couple of weeks." She said from behind her newspaper.

Beth had piled Alex's plate with eggs, bacon, sausages, black pudding and fried bread. She began to walk across and said. "Oh I think you'll get some exercise most nights darling." She teased.

Alex popped her eyes above the top of the newspaper. "Someone's getting awfully confident." She folded up her paper so that Beth could put down her plate.

"Thank you, sweetheart. We'll see if you're as confident tomorrow night, when I've got you all to myself!"

Beth snorted and bent over to give Alex a kiss. "We shall see indeed." Beth ran her hand down her fiancé's arm, taking in her casual attire. Alex wore an open collared white shirt, with a red cardigan and light grey slacks.

"You look so sweet when you wear cardigans."

"Sweet? Are you mad woman?"

"Yes, sweet." She kissed Alex on the nose just as the footmen and maids came back into the room with the tea and coffee then went to get her own breakfast.

Charlie the footman came round filling their cups with tea.

Foster entered the room with the mail for Alex on a silver tray. "Good morning m'lord, Miss Beth."

Alex took the mail and said. "Morning Foster, is everything prepared for our guest's arrival?"

"Yes m'lord. Miss Beth, Mrs Mcklusey asked me to relay to you that she would be glad to meet with you in Lady Dalton's writing room." The writing room was a study of sorts used by all of the former Lady Dalton's. Alex had explained to Beth that the room was now hers. It was where she would deal with any staffing and housekeeping issues.

"Very good, thank you Foster." said Beth confidently.

Alex looked on at the conversation with a small smile. She could see Beth starting to take her position as Lady of the house and it filled her with joy.

*This will be a happy, warm home again, at last.* She thought.

Beth looked at Alex's smile. "What?" She asked.

"I thought it would be a struggle, to get you to take on the authority of Lady of the house and give orders."

"Well Mrs Mcklusey hinted yesterday that perhaps we should meet to talk over this evening's meal. Then I thought it would be a good idea to consult the book Lotty gave me, on household management, apparently the mistress meets with the house keeper every morning to issue instructions of what she wants done for the lunch and evening meal, and any guests staying or dinner parties coming up.



You know I've never had this kind of life and I'm going to be stumbling through for a little while, but from tomorrow I'm going to be your wife, so I need to start acting like it and stop being such a shy girl. It's time to become a married woman, so I'm going to ignore the butterflies in my stomach and give instructions and have things in this house the way I want them. I want this to be a comfortable, warm loving home for you. You give me so much materially and this is one thing I can do for you. Look after you."

Alex beamed. "I have been waiting for you my whole life. You are everything to me, you know that don't you?" Alex asked softly.

"Yes. I see it in your eyes when you look at me. Now eat up your breakfast my lord! You're going to need a lot of energy for all these guests that are about to overrun us."

"Yes, my lady!" Alex gave her a mock salute and Beth burst out laughing.

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After breakfast, Beth had indeed gone to meet with Mrs Mcklusey, so Alex went to her in study in search of some peace before everyone started arriving.

She was going over her financial accounts, making sure everything was up to date.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come." said Alex.

Foster entered. "Yes, Foster?"

"M'lord I have a message for you. It's just been delivered." He handed over a folded piece of paper; Alex put her cigarette in the ashtray and took the paper from Foster.

"It's from Mr. Prichard, the Landlord at the Crown." Alex raised an eyebrow.

"He wants Poni and I to go down to the pub after dinner this evening."

"Yes m'lord. The estate workers and village men would like to have a few drinks and give you a proper send off, if you would be agreeable."

"It's a lovely idea, but I better run it past Miss Beth first. Do you remember that you'll need to send one of the footmen down to the station, to pick up Billy Boyd, in one of the other cars? I sent Alfie down to London in the Rolls, to pick up Miss Josephine."

"Yes I'm sending Charlie m'lord. The train gets in at midday."

"Is Miss Beth finished with Mrs Mckluskey?" asked Alex.

"Yes m'lord and she asked me inform you that the Woodward's are just arriving at the front door."

"Lead the way Foster."

They walked out to the front door, where they met Beth. All the servants were lined up to take the guests luggage as usual.

Alex lifted her arm for Beth to take and they walked out onto the front drive way. Luckily it was a clear day, cold and frosty, but dry. They watched Poni's Rolls come up the drive, followed by second car with the Valet, ladies maids to both Lady Grace and Lotty, and nanny to Kat.

"Sweetheart, are you ready to meet the elder Mrs Woodward?"

"Elder?" Beth said, rather confused.

"Poni's Mother, she and Poni's father brought me up, after my parents died. She retired to Derbyshire, where she originally came from, after Poni's father died. Poni set her up comfortably, with a small staff. She's a lovely Lady, old school aristocracy, like my Father. Poni's father was plain Mr Woodward, but his wife is Lady Grace, the daughter of the late Viscount Colridge."

"You certainly have connections. How old is she?" asked Beth.

"Seventy, but as sharp as a tack. Both our father's were extremely lucky in their choice of wives. My mother and Lady Grace were great friends."

Beth watched as Poni and the chauffeur helped Lotty, who had Kat in her arms, Lady Grace and Agnes out of the car.

Lotty came towards them, Kat was straining in her mother's arms to get to Alex, her favourite pal.

"Wix! Wix!" The little girl said excitedly. Lotty handed her into Alex's grateful arms

"Hello little kitten. How are you today? You ready to be a flower girl tomorrow?" The little girl nodded and pointed to Beth.

"Yeah! Mwah!" Kat puckered up her lips for a kiss.

"Hello sweetie." Beth said as the little girl gave her a kiss.

"Where's my kissy? Eh? Eh?" Alex tickled the little girl mercilessly. Kat giggled and laughed.

"Wix no! Mwah!"

"Ok then." Alex puckered up and received a sloppy kiss on the lips.

"That's a good girl."

Lotty hugged Beth. "Were here at last, what a journey! Kat was so excited; she was jumping all over the car. I can't wait to see your finished dress. What time is Jo arriving?"

"Midday, how was your journey?" She said as she gave Agnes a hug.

"Very good, that little girl kept us quite amused." replied Agnes. "Lady Grace was telling us some tales from Alex and Poni's youth."

"Oh no. Let me marry Beth before you tell her Agnes. Then she can't get away!" They all laughed.

Poni came forward towards Beth with Lady Grace on her arm. Lady Grace walked with a stick, and was obviously a little frail on her feet. She was a petite regal looking woman. Her greying curly hair sat immaculately, you could tell she had been a beautiful woman in her day by her facial bone structure. She had a lovely tweed suit on with matching hat and strings of real pearls round her neck. She was effortlessly elegant.

They came to stand right in front of Beth, and Poni said. "Mama, may I introduce Miss Beth Bentley. Beth, this is my mother Lady Grace."

"I'm pleased to meet your Ladyship." said Beth nervously.

The elderly woman's face broke out in a beaming smile.

"I'm delighted to meet you at last. Poni and Lotty have told me so much about you. I have you to thank for getting young Alex to settle down? I'll look forward to chatting to you later my dear."

When Kat saw Poni, she stretched her arms out to her other parent. "Papi! Papi!"

"Come here little kitten." Poni took her daughter from Alex.

Lady Grace then turned her attention to Alex.

"Now then Alex Dalton, I hear this girl stolen your heart."

"Only, because you were already taken my lady." Alex said charmingly.

"Oh please! Take me in before I catch my death."

She took Alex's arm and they all made their way into the drawing room.

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Everyone was now settled in the drawing room and tea was being served. Poni, Alex and Kat were sprawled over the floor playing with a toy horse show jumping set Alex had bought her.

"Papi? Silla." she pointed to the little toy horse.

"Is that Skylla Kitten?" said Poni.

"Uh huh Silla. Orsey." Kat looked up, her brown eyes looking innocently in Poni's and her heart melted, as it always did.

"When your bigger kitten, we'll get you a horsey of your own and Papi and Alex will teach you how to ride. Would you like that?"

The little girl nodded enthusiastically. "Orsey! Orsey!"

Turning to Alex she said. "I think I need to buy us something in the country. I would like Kat to have the childhood we had, running all over the woods, learning to ride, joining the pony club."

"I think that's a great idea old friend. Why don't you take something nearby, I'm sure Beth would love to have Lotty near and I'm sure this little kitten, you and myself can find mischief to be up to!" Alex said, tickling the little girl under the chin.

"Wix!" said the little girl batting her away.

"Sounds a fine idea, you sure you wouldn't mind us being close? Being newlyweds and all that."

"Poni you know you're like a sister to me and I hope before long, little Kat might have a playmate." Alex smiled.

"Really? Have Beth and you talked about children?"

"No, but I hope she will want that with me. Why don't you enquire about Romsford Hall? It's been standing empty, ever since old Lord Romsford died. It's only a few miles away."

"Yes, it could be worth a look. I'll make some inquiries while your away. It would be nice to have a country home for my family."

"Papi! Silla fall." Kat announced dramatically.

"Really! We must call a vet." said Poni mining a telephone with her hand.

Kat clapped her hands excitedly.

Alex mined answering the phone and said. "Alex Dalton here, Vet to the aristocracy at your service!"

Poni and Kat giggled.

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Beth, Lotty and Lady Grace sat over on the on the sofa, watching the three play on the floor. Agnes was visiting her new cottage on the grounds, Mrs Mcklusey, taking it on herself to show her round.

"Lotty dear, my granddaughter gets prettier and prettier." Lady Grace watched Lotty beam with pride.

"Thank you Mama Grace. Poni simply adores her. We were blessed the day she came into our life." said Lotty.

"And what about you young Beth, do you wish to again fill the rooms of Dencotte with the sounds of children's laughter?"

Beth hesitated; she was quite in awe of this grand old lady. "I...I never really thought about it, Lady Grace. I mean I always assumed I'd have children if I ever got married, but when I fell in love with Alex, I thought that wasn't a possibility, but then I met little Kat and realised maybe there was a way."

"There are a lot of children out there in need of love Beth, and you have a lot to give." said Lotty.

"Yes, that's true. Alex is so good with Kat, I think she would adore a child, well I hope. We'll have to talk about it."

"Beth, you're a good girl and I know the late Lady Dalton, my dear friend Mary, would have been delighted that her beloved Alex has found you." Lady Graced patted Beth's hand.

Now if you'll both excuse me, I'm tired after the journey, I think I'll have a lie down before lunch. Could you ask for my Ladies maid to escort me upstairs?"

"Certainly Lady Grace." Beth signalled to Liz, the housemaid.

"Liz, could you have Lady Grace's maid brought through? She wishes to have a lie down."

"Certainly Miss Beth." The maid replied and made her way out the room.

"Kat! Come and give your grandmother a kiss before she goes to rest." said Lotty.

The affectionate little girl was helped up onto wobbly legs by her Papi, led over to her grandmother and kissed her cheek.

"Nigh nigh Mam mama."

Lady Grace laughed and said."You are just a little sweetheart. Lotty this little girl will have suitors fighting over her!"

"Oh I know. I think I'll have to lock Poni in the cellar!"

They all laughed. "I'll remind you of this one day my lord." said Poni to her friend.

"Oh come on Poni. It's only a joke old friend."

"Well run along and play with your horse's kitten." Lotty told her daughter.

Lady Grace's maid came into the room and helped the old woman up to her room.

"She's a lovely woman. I was so nervous to meet her." said Beth.

"She is a quite remarkable lady. Most women can't say that about their mother in law. She loves her family fiercely. Remember, although Alex and Poni's parents were from very old families, they were very different from their contemporaries, a bit like Alex and Poni, they were determined to live their lives differently, they had new modern ideas and wanted to help the less fortunate, so she was never going to be a stuffy old woman."

"Lotty, Alex and I were talking. You know Kat is to be a flower girl?"

"Yes. Her dress is just darling!"

"Well we thought she could be the ring bearer as well. I know it's usual to have the rings on a cushion, and she's a little small for that, but we thought she could carry them in a little velvet bag. She means so much to us both. What do you think?"

"Oh that would just be perfect! This wedding will be smashing."

Kat's laughter and voice was getting louder and louder with all the attention from her two favourite playmates.

"Oh dear." said Lotty, rubbing her temples. "She gets a little over excited around those two. It's been a long day I can tell you, what with the car journey and everything. Poni my love?" said Lotty, trying to get her partner's attention.

"Yes darling?"

"Why don't you and Alex take Kat out to see the horses? She's been cooped up in that car all morning."

"Of course, come on kitten; let's go see Skylla and her friends." Poni said lifting the small girl up.

"Before we head out, Beth I got a message from some of the men down at the village. They wondered if Poni and I would like to go down to the pub after dinner, for a drink. A last hurrah sort of thing, but I don't want you to think I'm abandoning the night before our wedding. I wanted to ask you before Billy and Jo get here."

Beth smiled and looked at Looked who nodded her head in silent communication.

"That would be fine darling, take Billy then us girls can have a good talk and a look at my dress. What time will Tommy arrive?"

Alex leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. "Sometime this afternoon, they are staying at one of the cottages; He'll be up to join us for dinner though."

"Thank you, sweetheart. Come on then kitten; let's ask Mrs Read for some apples for the horses shall we?"

"Papples yeah! Silla Papples!"

They trio made their way to the drawing room door.

"Poni make sure you put on her scarf and hat as well as her winter coat. It's freezing out there." called Lotty after them.

"Yes dear. I will."

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Jo had arrived and Foster had shown her to the drawing room.

"The master and Miss Beth will be with you shortly."

"Thank you can you make sure the maids are extremely careful moving Miss Beth's dress."

"Of course!"

When Jo was alone, she took in the large room. She had been awed by both the house's beauty and size when the car had pulled up outside.

She looked round the large room. The ceiling had a painted fresco with elaborate gold covered cornice. The walls had many beautiful paintings and the furniture, to her untrained eye looked priceless.

*You are marrying well Beth!* She thought to herself.

As she finished her thought, Foster the butler came in with Billy Boyd. Jo groaned internally. She wished Alex and Beth would hurry up, so she didn't have to be left alone with the woman. Everything about her infuriated Jo, the way she lived her life, the arrogant way she behaved. Jo knew the pain that someone like Billy Boyd could cause.

"If you'll take a seat Miss Boyd, Lord Dalton will be with you as soon as possible." said Foster.

She looked nervously at Jo and sat placing a brown paper package on her knee.

Jo observed Billy had on a very modern silver suit, black tie, and White shirt.

"Hi Jo Jo."

"Don't call me Jo Jo! Managed to find a suit I see." Jo said mockingly.

"I do own them you know." Billy bit back. Her heart was thumping. Ever since she had met Jo at the Alley Cat, she hadn't stopped thinking about her. She had no idea why, they seemed to antagonise each other when they met, but there was something about Jo that she couldn't get out of her mind. First of all, she had turned Billy down, and women never turned her down, second she challenged her, she wasn't the usual bit of fluff that Billy took home, and thirdly Alex had advised her to take a look at her life and change it while she could. She had come to the wedding determined to do so.

"Look, let's not argue. You don't even know me."

"I know your type." Jo bit back.

"My type?" Billy's temper threatened to overflow, but remembering Alex's words, swallowed the anger down.

"I know you don't like me very much and I accept that, I won't try chatting you up or any games, I promise. Let's just enjoy this weekend with our friends. Would that be alright?"

"Yes." said Jo, very surprised at Billy's words.

Billy stood up and, carrying her parcel, came over to sit by Jo.

"I was hoping to see you alone so I could give you this. I wanted to make up for the harsh words we had when we met. I'm not really the person you think you saw that night. I saw this and thought you would enjoy it. I remembered you were a designer. Please open it."

Jo was quite astonished. This Billy was quite different to the one she had met, that night at the Alley Cat.

She unwrapped the brown paper and took out a leather bound album.

"What's this?" She looked up at Billy quizzically.

"Open it, please."

Jo opened the first page and printed in gold lead leaf was *Chanel Collection*. Her heart began to speed up, she turned the next page and found an original design drawn and signed by Coco Chanel.



She gasped in wonder. She turned page after page and saw one design after another. The book held designs from Chanel's last collection. She looked up open mouthed at Billy.

"How on earth did you get hold of this?"

"I have friends who know people. Do you like it?" Her heart was dry with nerves.

"Like it? I would never have even dreamed of owning something like this. Why did you go to all this bother to find this and it must have cost a fortune."

"I just knew you would get a lot of pleasure from it, I wanted to start a fresh with you and hope you would see I'm more than the womaniser you think you saw that night. And as for money, I do quite well and have no one to spend it on, but myself; it was nice to use it to buy something that I knew was your passion." explained Billy.

"I...I....I don't know what to say. Thank you, Billy. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. They shared moment looking deeply into each other's eyes, when the door burst open and in came the whole house, breaking the spell between them.

In came Alex and Beth, the Woodward's with little Kat and Agnes. Lady Grace was resting in her room, but promised she would see them in the dining room for lunch.

"Billy, Jo! Delighted your here. I see you managed to find a suit Billy boy." said Alex sarcastically.

"Yes thank you." She scowled.

Lotty turned to her daughter and said. "Kitten? I would like you to meet our friends. Billy and Jo. Say hello."

"Ello!"

"Hello there, aren't you just precious." Jo said to Kat.

"What have you got there Jo?" asked Beth.

"Em...Billy brought it for me. It's a book of original designs by Chanel for her last collection." She said quietly.

Beth and Lotty simply looked at each other and smirked.

"That was very kind Billy." said Poni, picking up on her wife's merriment.

"Well, I thought she'd like it." Billy said while staring at her shoes.

The tension in the room was quite pronounced so Alex said. "Well, shall we head in for lunch?"

After lunch they'd had a run through of the wedding service. Everything seemed to go well. Kat had been put down for an afternoon nap after being tired out by Poni, Alex and Billy, giving her a horseback rides round the banqueting hall.

Dencotte house was finally waking up.

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Later that evening, they had gathered in the drawing room, waiting for Tommy and his partner before going through to dinner. Kat had been fed and put to bed an hour ago, giving Lotty a chance to relax with her friends. Agnes being very tired had decided to leave the young people to it and have an early night at her cottage.

Lotty signalled to Beth to turn her gaze to Jo. She did and found her eyes taking in the sight of Billy Boyd in her dinner suit. Jo turned in time to see the smirk of her friends.

"What?" She asked.

"Nothing, nothing at all." Lotty said innocently.

Lady Grace whispered to Lotty. "Do I detect a romance in the offing?"

"If only they'd stop being so stubborn, yes."

"Love will find a way my dear, it always does."

Alex, Poni and Billy, were over by the fireplace drinking champagne and chatting.

"So what do you think Billy?" Alex repeated.

"W...what did you say?"

Alex shook her head and smiled at Poni.

"I said will you come for a pint with us after dinner? You might hear me the first time if you could tear your eyes away from a certain girl. She'll catch you staring one of these times"

"I am not staring. She just irritates me."

"Oh give up the pretence Billy." said Poni. "That's why you brought her that extremely hard to get hold of and expensive present."

"I think she got under Billy boy's skin from the moment she met her and challenged her, and I think you took some of the advice I gave you at the Alley Cat." added Alex.

"I just hate the superior attitude she has towards me. She thinks she has me all figured out. The arrogant player, who beds a new girl every night, but she has no idea."

"Of course you're more than that, but you have to admit you have behaved like I have with girls over the years, so you can't blame her for making assumptions. Show her something different Billy. I know from what the girls have told us that she was hurt badly by someone." explained Alex.

"I can't imagine ever wanting to hurt that girl." as Billy said this, Jo lifted her eyes to hers and they were lost.

Foster the Butler entered. "Mr Tommy Martin and Mr James Swan m'lord."

"Tommy, come in! Jamie nice to see you again." Alex shook their hands. Then shook hands with Poni and Billy.

"Evening guv'nor." Replied Tommy.

Alex steered them over to the three seated women. "Tommy you already know Lotty and Beth, but Jamie, may I introduce my bride to be, Beth Bentley and our friend Jo Stafford.

"Pleased to meet you both!" Jamie said enthusiastically. "So you're the blushing bride dearie? Oh you look divine; you must show me your dress!"

Beth smiled. This young man was very different from any she had met. He was thin, about five feet nine inches, with brown curly hair. His faced looked soft, angelic, boyish even, nothing like Tommy. Where he was a tough brash East end man, this young man was refined, middle class and obviously took good care of himself. Although he wore a dinner jacket, unlike the others he wore a bright red silk bow tie.

"Jamie, don't overwhelm the ladies, you know you can get a bit over excited." Tommy warned his friend.

"Oh shush Tommy and get me some champers! These ladies and I are going to be the best of friends!" Jamie said sitting beside them as they giggled.

Tommy shrugged his shoulders in surrender and turned to take a drink from Alex. Jamie was the only person on the planet who could get away with shushing Tommy Martin.

"So how do you know Tommy Jamie?" asked Beth.

The other two women stared at her quizzically as Jamie laughed and said. "You are so sweet Beth! Is she really this innocent?" He asked the other two women.

"Yes. I don't think she has ever met anyone like you my dear!" said Lotty.

"You're right there Lotty. There is no one quite like me!" turning to Beth he said. "I'm Tommy's better half. You know, the way you are Alex's girl?" He said waiting for the penny to drop.

It took a second then. "Oh right! I understand sorry." Beth said feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Yes we've been together five years now. He rescued me. A couple of ruffians were roughing me up outside a club in London, calling me a pansy, pushing me about, that sort of thing. Well next thing I know, Tommy and a couple of his boys have them up against a wall, giving them a taste of their own medicine. He came over to check on me and I looked up into those gorgeous eyes and fell head over heels. He took me home so his mother could tend to my wounds, I think it was just an excuse to keep seeing me, and we've been together ever since."

"That's so romantic!" said Jo.

The dinner gong went. Alex, Poni and Tommy came over to escort their respective partners.

Billy looked over at Jo nervously. Taking a deep breath she approached and said. "Would you allow me to escort you into dinner?"

"Yes. Thank you." Taking Billy's arm they followed the other couples to the dining room.

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The dining room was full of laughter and conversation. They had finished their meal and were chatting over some glasses of Port.

Alex looked at her watch, then stood up and said. "We should be making tracks down to the village around about now. We'll escort you Ladies to the drawing room and then make our way. Foster?"

"Yes m'lord?"

"Can you have Alfie bring the car round, please?"

"Certainly m'lord."

"Jamie you're free to come with us or stay with the ladies. There was some talk of getting the wedding dress out?" She smiled.

"I'll stay here thank you, I love nothing more than to talk fashion and I detest Smokey pubs. That alright honey?"

"Whatever makes you happy treacle, just don't walk down to the hotel on your own. Telephone me at the pub when you're ready to go and I'll send Tiny for okay?" said Tommy.

"You worry too much, but alright."

"Alex, Poni, Tommy and Billy, left their seats to escort the ladies and Jamie to the drawing room.

Once they were seated and comfortable, Billy looked on tensely at Jo as the others kissed the partner's.

Jo looked up caught Billy looking, her heart skipped a beat. "I hope you have a good evening Billy." She said with sincerity.

"Thank you. You too. Goodnight Jo Jo." The name, she assumed, Billy used to annoy her, didn't seem to annoy her as much anymore.

After they had left the room, Beth said. "Well ladies and gentleman. The dress!"

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The table in the pub was full of both empty and full pints glasses and whiskey glasses. Every five minutes it seemed, a new tray was brought over by the landlord.

"With compliments of Mr Smith of lower farm m'lord." The pub was full of joy and fun as the small group of friends were bought round after round of drinks. The Dalton family were well loved, Alex in particular. They wanted to give her a proper send off for her last night of freedom.

"Jacob?" Alex said taking her wallet out and handing over a wad of notes.

"Everyone's been too kind. Make sure no one pays for another drink tonight, put this money behind the bar."

"Why thank you m'lord! Drinks on the house for the rest of the night by the grace of our master Lord Dalton!" Said Jacob the landlord.

A huge cheer went up and Alex received a lot of back slapping and good wishes.

The small group were very much enjoying themselves and starting to feel the effects of all the alcohol, drinking both pints and malt whiskey chasers, and enjoying some fine cigars.

"So Billy boy, what the story with you and that lovely looking girl?" asked Tommy.

Billy being a bit drunk let her true feelings come out.

"She's beautiful! And she hates me."

Alex also worse for wear slurred. "Sshe doesn't hate youu fool!"

"She does, she thinks am a cad who wants to sleep with her and run. I don't! Well I do want to sleep with her, but I wouldn't run. Not from her. I'd cuddle her and kiss her, and kiss, and kiss her!"

Poni, a little less drunk than the others piped up. "I think she feels something for you Billy, there's been a spark right from the beginning. You just have to court her and woo her. Prove she means something to you. She's not some girl you met in the pub Billy."

"Wwoooo er? Ow do I do that?"

Alex jumped up. "I'm an sexpert in courting! I mean expert. You av to buy flowers, go to linner, buy chocolates. Girls like chocolates. My Beth likes chocolates, I luv her you know, I never thought I could be this h...happy! I luv er Poni." Alex said emotionally to her best friend.

Tommy stood up. "To Beth!"

"To Beth! They all responded, downing their drinks.

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Beth had retired to bed. They had all had a lovely evening looking at her dress and new clothes. She had made another friend in Jamie. *He was such good fun!* She thought.

She heard a lot of banging downstairs. It must be Alex, Poni and Billy coming back.

Beth smiled thinking of how they had all ribbed Jo about Billy. It was obvious they liked each other but they were both stubborn and Jo had been hurt. She hoped they could get past it.

She heard laughing, and banging coming up the stairs, and then she heard a little knock at her door.

"Beth! Sweetheart!"

"Alex is that you?" She got up and went to the door but didn't open it.

"Yes it's me. I miss you little bit."

*She's drunk.* Beth thought amused.

"Oh I miss you too. We're not supposed to see each other the night before the wedding darling."

"I know. I just wanted to hear your voice. Love you so much."

It warmed Beth's heart to think that no one got to see this side of Alex. For all that she was tough, hard and commanding. With Beth and their love, she could be so vulnerable, so unsure of herself.

"I love you too darling. Just one more night and we'll never be apart."

"You'll be mine? Forever?"

"Yours forever my lord. Now get to sleep or you'll be too ill tomorrow for our wedding. Then I would have to kill you!"

"Goodnight little bit."

"Good night my lord."

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The next morning everyone was having breakfast together except for Beth, who had been taken a tray in her room. She wasn't to be seen till the ceremony.

Alex didn't feel as bad as expected. Thomas, her valet had awoken her up with a hangover cure he swore by. Billy fared less well. She sat looking a little pale at her food and it didn't help that Kat was loud and excited.

"Bwilly, not well?" She asked her Mother.

"Yes, so we have to be nice and quiet alright Kitten?"

"Yeff Mama." She said turning to grab handfuls of scrambled egg again.

Poni entered the breakfast room with Kat's stuffed bear.

"Papi Poni!" She squealed, forgetting her promise. Billy grimaced and Jo smirked.

"Try and not lose Mr Teddington again Kitten. He was under your bed,"

"Mifer egton! No ost!" The little girl said seriously to the bear.

Lady Grace smiled at her little Granddaughter.

"Come to Grand Mama and show me your Teddy bear."

The little girl climbed up on her lap. "Gram Mama Mif egton fren wiv innie a Pooh."

"Is he indeed? Well Winnie the pooh is fine bear. He likes honey, does Mr Teddington?"

"Uh huh, ooh! Ou no what elf Gram Mama? Papi call Mama Piget!" The friends around the table snorted and laughed, Poni went bright red. Lotty cleared her throat and hoping to change the subject said.

"When are, you going to get ready Alex?" Alex had come down for breakfast in casual clothes for breakfast, opting to get her wedding suit on later.

Alex smiled and said. "I think another hour. I want to be ready so I can have a look at how everything looks in the grounds. There's no rain yet. Hopefully it'll hold off for the ceremony then we can get back into the banqueting hall for the food and dancing."

Alex looked up at Billy's suffering.

"Charlie. Could you ask Thomas to make up another glass of that hangover cure for Billy please?" Charlie was walking round the table filling up the cups of tea.

"Certainly m'lord."

Jo looked at Billy, feeling a little sorry for her now.

"Is there anything I could get you Billy? Maybe some dry toast would settle your stomach."

"Thank you, but I think I'll just lie down till I have to get ready. Could I have that hangover cure up in my room Alex?"

"Of course. I'll have it sent up and have someone wake you in plenty of time to dress for the wedding."

"Thanks Alex."

"I'll help you to your room." said Jo.

"Thanks." Billy said astonished at her kindness.

As they left the room the others smiled at each other knowingly.

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They approached her room and Billy said. "Thanks. I'll be fine from here"

"It's alright. Let me help you. Now take you shirt and trousers off and jump under the covers. You'll feel better with another hours rest."

Billy just looked at her, unsure what to do.



"Oh sorry. I'll turn round. Give me shout when you're under the covers."

She could Billy struggling with her clothes. She had no idea why she was doing this, but something about Billy just made her care.

"Okay. I'm under."

Just then, Thomas arrived with the hangover cure. She chugged down the disgusting drink and lay back.

Jo sat on the bed beside her.

"You'll feel better now."

"I thought you'd be giving me a hard time about my illness being self inflicted." She groaned.

"Well. You're allowed to enjoy yourself, it was your friends last single night out, there's nothing wrong with having a good time with your friends."

What she didn't reveal was that last night she had overheard Billy coming home.

Poni was trying to help her to her room. She was stumbling and laughing along the corridor. They went past Jo's room and she jumped out of bed and opened it a crack. She saw Poni trying to pull Billy along.

*"Come on old chap you'll feel better once you're in bed. Billy come on my wife will be waiting for me."*

*"I wish I had a wife! I'll never have a wife! No one will ever love me. The first woman I feel something about and she thinks I'm no good! As soon as I saw her Poni, it was like comets and shooting stars exploding all around her. Like you read about in books! I want her to like me; I want her to think I'm good enough for her. I don't want all those girls. I want Jo Poni! Why am I never good enough for girls like that? No one's ever loved me. Jo Jo's so pretty. She has these eyes Poni, sometimes their green, sometimes a bit blue. Like the briny sea. When she looks at me, I think my heart will stop, when she argues with me, I just want to kiss her to make her stop, but I'm not good enough for her."*

*"Well maybe when she gets to know you better Billy. Show her you're not a love em and leave em type anymore. Make the effort for her and maybe she'll change her mind. Now come on Billy, or Lotty's going to swing for me!"*

*They made their way along the corridor and Jo shut her bedroom door. Her heart was hammering, she was astonished.*

Jo stood up to leave when she felt a hand grasp her wrist. "Please would you sit till I fall asleep? Please? Tell me about your job, your dreams; what do you want to do with your life. Tell me and I'll close my eyes."

"Alright, I was born in the east end, we were poor, but had a dream of being a fashion designer so I worked a few jobs so I could go to art college. I won top honours on graduating and had offers from a few fashion houses but Hartnell's offered me a position with more freedom in what I could design so I took that. They had a reputation for being a little old fashioned so they wanted new blood to stop the younger women going over to buy at the Paris fashion houses. My dream is to have my own fashion house where I can set new trends with nothing holding me back. I don't think I'll ever get there though it takes a lot of money."

She smiled when she heard a soft snore coming Billy. She stroked her hair. "Why have you behaved the way you have with women when you're capable of so much more."

She leant over and kissed Billy lightly on the cheek.

"Rest well cheeky chops."

She stood and left the room, when the door clicked Billy's eyes popped open. "No one ever thought I was good enough Jo Jo, that's why."

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Beth had surprisingly slept well. Laura woke her up with breakfast of tea, bacon, eggs and toast. She had expected to be out of her mind with nerves but she was surprisingly calm. She looked at her beautiful engagement ring, soon to be joined by a gold band, they had picked together, at a Jeweller in London.

She picked up the picture of her father; she kept at the side of the bed and smiled.

"I know this isn't exactly how you pictured my life turning out Daddy, but you should that I'll never find a better or more loving partner in life. I love you daddy." She said to the picture.

There was a knock at the door. "Beth it's us, can we come in?" called her two friends.

"Of course. Come in."

The door opened and Lotty and Jo came in along with an over excited Kat.

"Anny Eth ! It's the eddying day!" She squealed.

"Yes it is. Come up here my little flower girl." She jumped up beside Beth.

"Don't worry Beth, you don't have to panic now were here, we'll handle everything." said Jo.

"I'm fine honestly, I don't know why, but now the days here I'm very calm."

Jo and Lotty looked at each other strangely.

"What? What's wrong with being calm on your wedding day?"

"It's a little strange. I kept thinking I was going to be sick until I got down the aisle and Poni took my hand, and then everything was fine." said Lotty.

"Well I'm fine. So how is everybody downstairs? Is Alex alright? She was a little drunk last night."

"She's not too bad surprisingly. Just excited it's poor Billy that's suffering." said Lotty.

"Willy sick!" the little girl mimed Billy's antics much to the amusement of the three women.

Lotty looked up at Beth's dress hanging up over the wardrobe beside a smaller version for Kat.

"Right let's get started, you get your bath and we'll set out the clothes alright."

Laura came in from the en suite bathroom and said. "Your Bath's ready, Miss Beth."

"Thank you Laura. I'll right there."

"We'll get Kat ready first. Come on Kitten; let's get your pretty dress on."

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Thomas was helping Alex to dress. Both Poni and she were wearing light grey morning suits. Alex was currently dressed sans jacket and tie, Thomas was just fastening her cufflinks. When he finished he said. "Are these cufflinks satisfactory for you my lord?"

He stood back and allowed Alex to check her appearance in the mirror. Light grey suit trousers, crisp white shirt and light grey waistcoat, her tie was hanging loose round her neck.

"Very good, Thomas. Could you hand me my pocket watch."

The pocket watch had belonged to Beth's father and she had given it to Alex on their engagement. It was very precious to her.

Thomas attached it to the watch chain on her waistcoat and popped the watch in the small pocket on the waistcoat designed for it.

Poni knocked and came in. "What ho! How are you doing old man? I must say I look very handsome in these suits."

"Very funny, I'm sure your wife thinks so. How much time do we have left?"

"An hour before kick-off it's 11 o'clock. The guests should be arriving soon."

They had planned that the guests who were staying in the village would arrive and receive welcome drinks in the banquet hall, then be shown to the Japanese garden for the ceremony.

"Were in good order then, I want to go out to the garden and make sure everything is the way I want it."

She had arranged for an open marquee area to be set up in the garden in case of light rain.

"Did you make it known that no one was to bring Sally Weston? And that she was not welcome as a partner of any of our invited guests?"

"Yes don't worry! Everyone knows it's more than there life is worth."

Sally Weston was an old conquest of Alex's, who had tried on more than one occasion, to come between Alex and Beth.

"Thomas, give us a fifteen minutes or so would you."

"Yes m'lord."

"Let's have a seat and a smoke before everything goes a bit haywire." Alex said offering her pack to Poni.

"Well, you ready for this? Married life?"

"I can't wait old friend. Once I get that ring on her finger, I'm never going to let go. I never even dreamed my life would turn out like this. "

"You're very lucky, but you are a thundering good chap, so you deserve it. Just think after lunchtime you'll be sharing this bedroom for the rest of your life."

Alex laughed gently. "I can't wait for that bit. I am given to understand your better half is going to help redecorate this room, when we get back from New York."

"Oh no! You know what that means don't you? We'll have to redecorate as well, because she'll see so many things that she just 'must have!' said Poni imitating her wife.

"Have you told her about buying a place in the country?"

"Not yet. I thought we'd talk about it in Paris. Kat is going to stay with my mother so we can have some time to ourselves. My Mother loves the opportunity to spoil that girl."

"A bit like someone else who will remain unnamed!" Alex smirked at Poni.

"Well what can I say? I'm guilty as charged; my two girls are the light of my life. I hope you get to have the same joy someday."

"I hope so my friend." Foster entered the room.

"Huhm. Sorry to bother you my lord." He looked a little nervous.

"What is it Foster? Is it Beth?" She said standing.

"Oh no My Lord. Its em...well.....Norton and his lads have caught a man trespassing on the estate." Norton was the estate game keeper.

"He insists he is family and would be welcome at the wedding, but Norton isn't convinced. He says he is Miss Bentley's uncle and insists on seeing you."

"Argh! Not today! I didn't think he would be that stupid." Alex started pacing, anger pouring off her.

"What do you want us to do Alex?" asked Poni.

She rubbed her face with her hands. "I'm not getting my hands dirty on my wedding day. Foster have him taken to the estate managers office at the stables and see if Tommy and Tiny have arrived at the house yet, ask them to join me at the stable office and make sure Beth doesn't find out he is here."

"I will m'lord." Once he left Poni said.

"What do you want to do old man?"

"Let's get down there. I'd leave your jacket here, Poni. We don't want to get dirty, or Lotty and Beth will thrash us to within an inch of our lives!"

They made their way down through the servant's corridors and staircases. These were built into stately homes so that servants could go about their daily chores without bumping into the family or any guests. On this occasion it allowed them to make their way down to the stable buildings without bumping into any wedding guests.

They walked across the courtyard towards the office. Outside the door stood two of Tommy's boys stood guard outside the door. They nodded as Alex and Poni passed, they entered the office and found Jim Bentley sat waiting on one side of the desk, Tiny's big hands on his shoulders keeping him in place. Tommy stood off to the side.

Alex sat down at the desk, leaned back in the chair, legs crossed in a very relaxed pose. Poni stood behind her, looking very sternly at Jim.

Alex took out a cigarette from her packet and very precisely and slowly lit it, took a drag from it, all the time staring at Jim.

Jim was shaking at this obvious display of power. Even though, Alex had warned him before, Jim didn't really believe that two women were anything to be afraid of. Alex had broken a couple of ribs when she punched him, but he believed he was entitled to his share of Beth's good fortune. Why should he and Ada struggle while Beth was lavished with luxury?

It was her eyes that terrified him. The cold blue eyes seemed to bore down inside him and looked as if she would kill him as easily as snapping her fingers.

Alex set the cigarette box on the desk and sat her lighter very precisely on top.

Finally the long silence was broken.

"Well Jim Bentley. I didn't expect to see you again, especially on my wedding day. I had thought we had an understanding."

"W....we.....are going to be family. I thought my niece would need her uncle to walk her down the aisle."

"I see. I understood that, after our last conversation, you thought me an unnatural bitch and your niece a whore. So forgive if I find your new found enthusiasm for your niece's marriage, a bit hard to believe."

Jim's heart was hammering, his breathing becoming faster as panic gripped him.

"Look fifty pounds wasn't enough! I need more! Me and Ada deserve to be taken care off! If you don't want your fine guests to see your new tart of a wife's embarrassing relatives then you'll give me more!"

Tiny grabbed the man round his neck and Tommy shouted, pulling a knife out of his jacket. "Guv! Let me slice this bloke's bollocks off!"

Jim shrieked in fear. "No! Please no! Get him away from me."

"Tiny! Tommy! "Alex shouted getting them to calm down.

She stood and walked round to face Jim, who was still being held round the neck.

"I warned you what would happen if you ever bothered my wife or me again Jimbo."

"Wife! There is no such title! I'm going to the police as soon as I get out of here and away from these big apes! Just because you have a title, what makes you think you have the right to do this to me! Why should you get away with it?"

Alex bent over and stared into his eyes. "I can Jimbo, because for better or for worse this is the way this country works, there is a class system and I am at the top of that tree while you are at the bottom. I am the Countess of Sheffield and I am the law around here. I have fought for this country and watched good men and women die for it, while the likes of you were dodging the call up. Yes I've done my homework on you James Dalton. Stealing, fraud, the list goes on. As for the police, you will currently find them enjoying my hospitality, while waiting to be guests at my wedding."

She grabbed his jaw and squeezed. "You will get not one more penny out of me, I warned you not to show your face again, well you'll pay." She shoved his face back in disgust, stood up and pulled down her waistcoat.

"I have a wedding to go to. Tommy, could you have your lads take him for a quiet talking to out in grounds."

"No! Please!" Jim shouted. Tiny clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Then put him on a train to.....say Glasgow?"

"With pleasure my lord." said Tommy.

She gave one last disgusted look down at Jim's frightened eyes and said. "IF I EVER SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN. YOU WILL BE A DEAD MAN!"

She turned to Poni. "Shall we Poni? I have a young woman waiting to become Lady Dalton. Tommy, don't miss the ceremony."

"Don't worry guv'nor. It won't take long to take out the rubbish."

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"There! What do think?" asked Jo.

Beth stood in front of a full length mirror, taking in the sight of her wedding dress.

"You look stunning my dear, every inch the Lady." added Lotty.

Beth looked in the mirror and didn't recognise herself. She had on a simple straight white, off the shoulder wedding dress and as it was winter, over the top she wore a white cape with a fur lined

hood. She would still be chilly, but it was only for the ceremony. Laura had pinned her hair up with little white flowers from the garden, and her makeup was done very simply.

"You're beautiful Miss Beth." Laura said.

"Thank you everyone. You've all been so helpful, I used to feel so alone, but I have so much, so many good friends. Thank you for being there for me."

Lotty wiped a tear away. "Come now, before you ruin your make up. Agnes is waiting for you."

Since Beth had no family member to walk her down the aisle and Poni was Alex's best man, she decided to ask Agnes to give her away. The woman had been so kind and like a mother to her.

Agnes met her at the stairs and escorted Beth out to the waiting car, which was driving them up to the Japanese garden.

"Are you ready Beth?" asked Agnes.

"As I'll ever be." *Right Beth. Heads up, shoulders back. I don't think my life will ever be the same again!* She mused.

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The Japanese garden was looking wonderful. Jones, the estate steward, had organised the ceremony area. The trees and stone walls were glistening with frost, giving the look of a Christmas card. Wooden board had been laid over the gravel, where the seating area was placed and a raised platform under bare trees. A canopy was strung over the rectangle of the garden to protect the wedding party and the guests from any rain or snow.

Alex and Poni were stood on the raised platform, Alex nervously fingering her collar. She looked behind to see the seated guests. She recognised some of their friends from the Alley Cat, some friends of the family and people from the village and the estate. The guests were mixed on both sides of the aisle, as Beth only really had Agnes to sit on hers. On the front row, where Alex's family would have sat were Mrs Mcklusey, Mrs Read, Foster, Jones and other elder members of the household staff. Alex had insisted her staff were seated and stood prominently as they were only family she had. Some of her friends were peers of the realm like herself, but they found themselves sitting next to farmers, estate workers, shop keepers, policemen. That was Alex's way.

The car carrying Beth arrived at the garden area. Lotty and Jo got out first, helping Kat, then Agnes then Beth.



From the platform a young woman began to play the harp. The angelic music suited the crisp magical scene perfectly.

A servant brought over a little red bag with gold braid, which had the two wedding rings in it. Lotty took it and handed it over to her daughter.

"Remember what we practiced kitten?" The little girl nodded. Lotty turned to Beth. "Good luck." Then began to walk down the aisle; her daughter up in her arms, holding the rings.

Next came Beth and Agnes followed by her other bridesmaid Jo.

Alex turned to get her first glimpse of Beth in her wedding dress, and she forgot to breath. Beth looked like an angel and she was walking up the aisle to become her wife.

"Breathe old chap. Breathe!" whispered Poni in her ear.

Lotty and Kat stood off to the side and Beth arrived at her fiancé's side. Apex leaned over and whispered. "You are stunning little bit." Beth gave Alex a shy smile.

One member of the congregation did not have eyes on the happy couple. Billy's eyes were locked on Jo; their eyes met as she passed Billy going down the aisle, Jo's stomach lurched as she looked into the eyes that were threatening to steal her heart.

The Rectors voice broke their gaze.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together these two young people in holy matrimony.

I would like to welcome you all to witness the joining of Lady Alexandria and Elizabeth Bentley. We have come to share their joy, and to celebrate their love.

"Who gives this woman to Lady Alexandria?" The rector asked.

"I do." Said Agnes, giving Alex Beth's hand, she then took her seat at the front.

The rector opened his bible and began the service in earnest.

"I suspect some people will think this is quite an unusual marriage and they'd be right!"

The rector said with a smile, which he received a quiet laugh from the congregation.

"They're may be people who would judge harshly what we're here to do today. Those people though, will not have had not had the fortune to meet Lady Dalton and like some of our guests today, have grown up with her. Those of us who do, know of no better person to be our Lord and master, she has given greatly to the livelihood, health and wellbeing of every person fortunate

enough to work for her or receive her patronage. We trust in God that she is walking the path that he intended. God did not want us to walk that path alone and so today; we share in their vows of love and commitment to each other. True marriage cannot simply be held true by a legal piece of paper, no it takes two hearts full of love, devoted to each other for this life and thereafter. And so I say to you, friends and neighbours that their marriage is as true under god as any other. Their hearts prove it to be so.

As we stand in God's creation, I will ask you to stand and sing with me, the first Hymn on your order of service, All things bright and Beautiful."

The congregation stood and sang. Alex and Beth kept stealing glances at each other.

*I can't believe she's going to be mine. Please God, give me the strength to never let her down or disappoint her.* Alex prayed.

After the hymn finished the vows began.

"First, I must ask if anyone here present knows of any reason why these two people may not be joined in matrimony, to declare it now."

Alex looked round the guests with hard eyes daring anyone to speak.

The rector turned to Alex.

"Lady Alexandria, will you take Elizabeth Bentley to be your wife?

Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?"

"I will." Alex answered firmly.

The rector then turned to Beth.

"Elizabeth Dalton, will you take Lady Alexandria to be your partner in life?

Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her, and, forsaking all others be faithful to her as long as she both shall live?

"I will." Beth said, the emotion telling on her voice.

"Elizabeth and Lady Alexandria, I now invite you to join hands and make your vows, in the presence of God and his people."

Alex and Beth stood facing each other, hands joined, and then Alex repeated after the Rector.

"I Alexandria Mary Hallwood Dalton, take you, Elizabeth Anne Bentley, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part; according to Gods holy law.

In the presence of God I make this vow."

Alex smiled at her wife as Beth began to repeat her vows.

The rector then asked for the rings. Poni walked over to her daughter, removed from the pillow and give her a quick kiss before handing them over to the Rector.

Alex took the smaller gold band from atop the bible. She placed it on Beth's ring finger and repeated again the Rectors words.

"Elizabeth Anne Bentley, I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.

With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy spirit."

Tears started to fall down Beth's cheeks. She retrieved the larger band from the Bible and repeated the vows, struggling to talk through her tears.

The Rector ended the ceremony with the proclamation.

"In the presence of God, and before this congregation Lady Alexandria and Elizabeth have their consent and made marriage vows to each other.

They have declared their marriage by the giving and receiving of rings.

I therefore proclaim they are partners in life."

The Rector winked and said. "You may kiss the bride."

Alex took Beth's face gently in her hands and kissed her mouth softly, tracing her tongue around her lips.

To their side Poni shouted. "Three cheers for Lord and Lady Dalton!"

The congregation joined in and clapped.

"You can put her down now Alex!" said Poni to the amorous couple.

They pulled away and received kisses and congratulations from their friends and family.

"Shall we Lady Beth?" Alex asked offering her arm.

"Thank you my lord." Alex led them down the aisle, dodging waves of rice that were being thrown over them, and into the waiting car, which would take them up to the reception at the house.

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The newly joined couple walked up the steps to the house. At the top Alex said.

"Wait!"

"Alex, what are you doing?" She squealed as her partner scooped her up into her strong arms.

"Carrying you over the threshold, sweetheart." Alex said giving her a huge smacker on the lips.

The staff who were at the wedding, had raced back to the house while the young couple had taken congratulations from the congregation, were now lined up in the entrance hall.

Alex put Beth down, not wanting to embarrass her in front of the servants.

Foster and Mrs Mckluskey stepped forward.

"On behalf of the staff, Mrs Mcklusey and I would like to welcome you home Lord and Lady Dalton." said Foster.

Alex saw the emotion on the face of her bride and it made her heart joyful that she could bring such joy to her beloved.

"Thank Foster. Lady Beth and I would like to thank you all for making our special day perfect. You have all been my family for as long as I can remember and I'm so glad I can share this day with you all. Foster could you let us know when all the guests are assembled in the banqueting hall? We will be in my study."

"Of course m'lord." said Foster.

Alex escorted Beth into her study. Once the door was closed, she wrapped her wife up in a huge bear hug.

"We did it little bit; I've captured you at last!" Alex growled as she nuzzled her Beth's neck.

Beth giggled. "I did so enjoy getting captured my lord!" She looked down at their clasped hands, their two gold wedding rings sitting proudly.

"I never in my life imagined being this happy Alex. You've made my dreams come true."

"This is only the start. I can't tell you how amazing beautiful you look."

"You look rather handsome yourself. Can I tell you a secret?"

"What?"

"I love it when you wear waistcoats with your suits." Beth drew her finger down the front of her chest.

"Why?" Alex asked slightly puzzled.

"Well, when you take your jacket off, it makes your shoulders look more pronounced somehow. You know how I love your strong shoulders."

Seeing the lust in her wife's eyes made groin tighten.

"Oh really? I'll have to remember that." She gave Beth's lips a kiss which almost immediately deepened. Beth moaned into the kiss and Alex pulled away.

"Tonight, sweetheart. We have guests outside." Beth pulled Alex's head down by her neck and whispered. "I can't wait to give myself to you."

It was Alex's time to moan. "Oh little bit, you are a cruel woman. I have hours to wait in this state."

Beth laughed. "I'm sorry darling, I love you though."

"I'm sure your very sorry sweetheart." Alex said sarcastically.

"Perhaps we should change the subject then. It was so nice of the staff to welcome me like that. I can't tell you how it feels to finally have a home. They called me Lady Beth."

"Sweetheart, even though I can't legally give you my title, you are my wife in everything that counts, in my heart and to our friends and family. So here, this house and the village and to our friends, you will be Countess of Sheffield and Baroness Hallwood. You are that by every moral right. Of course people in London who don't know us and don't approve of our relationship, might not call you that, but you have legally changed your name, so you might have to content with Mrs Dalton amongst strangers. You think you can handle that?"

Beth smiled. "I think I might enjoy being plain Mrs Dalton in town, makes us sound like a normal married couple."

There was a knock at the door. "The guests are ready m'lord." called Foster.

"Well shall we Mrs Dalton?"

"Yes indeed my lord." They joked.

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The ballroom was alive with noise, chatter, laughter and good cheer. Footmen and maids moved around with trays of champagne. The banquet hall was laid out tables and chairs for the wedding meal, with a top table for the happy couple and their friends. At the other side of the room was a stage for the band that would be used for dancing in the evening.

Foster struck a gong to bring the room to attention. "If I could have your attention Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. Could you make your way into the next room? Give your names to the footmen and you will be seated. Thank you."

At the top table sat Lady Grace, Poni, Lotty, Kat, Tommy, James, Billy and Jo. Alex had thought it a good idea to sit them next to each other, to encourage what she knew the two young people were feeling.

It took a while to get everyone seated and settled, but when they were, Foster announced the happy couple.

"Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. Would you please welcome Lord and Lady Dalton!"

The couple entered arm in arm and took their seats at the top table.

A parade of maids and footmen came out with trays full of delicious food. Everyone's glass and plates were kept full and overflowing.

Poni turned to her friend who sat next to her. "Well you've done it old man. You got the girl at last. I never thought I'd see the day that'd you'd settle down. You've always had a capacity for love, you just needed the right woman and you got yourself one in a million."

"I did do, didn't I? So how's the speech best man?" Alex smiled.

Poni patted her top pocket. "Just fine, I have a few stories to tell."

"I'm sure, just be careful and don't scare my wife off so soon Poni." Alex warned.

"Would I? Do you see our little nervous guests over there? Making eyes at each other."

"Yes. They look like their meant for each other. Do me a favour old friend. While were away on honeymoon, invite them to dinner, or for a night out at the club. I think if left to their own devices, their stubbornness will keep them apart and that spark will dwindle and die. I just hate to think of Billy living the life that I did. She needs someone and Jo's such a fine girl."

"We will, don't worry, Lotty will be desperate for some company since you're taking her best friend away from her. I'll invite when we get back from Paris."

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Billy watched as Jo finished her dessert. She had been trying to search for something to say, she wasn't good at small talk, and felt there was so much to say on the tip of her tongue, but the words refused to come.

"Eh...it's been a lovely day, hasn't it?"

"Yes, just wonderful. It's such a beautiful estate, Beth is very lucky to have such a place to call home. Where do you live Billy?"

"I have a flat in the west end. Not really a home, but comfortable enough for me. I was born in the east end, just like yourself; my only dream in life was to make enough money so that I could have my own house and privacy. I managed to do that. I don't spend much time there."

"I can imagine." Jo said cuttingly.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well someone like you, out every night with different women, I'm sure you only go there to sleep, if that."

"Why do constantly make assumptions about me Jo Jo? My job is to work in clubs and music halls, I'll admit I do get women throwing themselves at me, and I'll admit I have indulged, why shouldn't I? I was young and single, wasn't hurting no one. I never gave anyone the wrong idea; I have always made it clear I didn't want anything other than something casual. We were all adults and had fun, but that doesn't mean I want that to be the rest of my life! Maybe I'm growing up and want more. I've tried to be nice to you, but it doesn't work, you seem intent on punishing me for something someone else did to you. Who hurt you so badly Jo Jo?"

"I told you not to call me Jo Jo! And whatever may have happened to me in my life is my business!" Jo snapped.

Billy downed her champagne trying to get control of her anger.

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Poni's speech had made the guests laugh and Alex blush more than once. After the speeches were made, the newlyweds and guests made their way to the ballroom for the cutting of the cake and dancing.

Foster once again banged the gong for attention. "Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, would you please welcome to the floor, for their first dance as a married couple. Lord and Lady Dalton."

Alex turned to her wife and said. "Shall we my lady?" Beth smiled sweetly and followed her partner onto the dance floor. The band struck up their song, *At last*. "Oh Alex, today has been a dream, I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

"We will never spend a night apart again little bit. I love you."

As the song progressed, Poni and Lotty and Tommy and James joined the floor. Little Kat left in the capable hands of her Grandmother.

Billy, who had been recognised by several women, had dismissed their requests for dances, instead keeping her eye on Jo, who was standing off to the side of the room, looking a bit lost.

Jo had fended off a few advances to dance, her beauty seemed to pique the interest of many a guest, but she had no inclination. For some reason, even though this was a happy day she thought back to the one who had broken her heart. That heart she had thought would never feel again, but ever since that fateful night when she met Billy, the charming rouge had made her feel things she thought had died. It made her angry that she couldn't control her feelings and her heart. That heart betrayed her by falling for the same type of womaniser as the person who had hurt her. Somehow though her subconscious was trying to shout out that Billy was different, but how could she ever trust again?

She was lost in her thoughts when she felt a hand on her back. She jumped at the touch.

"Hello, my names Lady Bridget, 2nd daughter of the Earl of Strathmore." The woman said, clearly trying to show off.

"Hello."

Jo looked up at the thin ageing aristocrat. She was thin, wore a less than perfectly kept suit and oozed sleaze.

"Would you care to dance my dear?"

"Em...no thank you. I'm not one for dancing."

"Please! A delicious young creature like yourself? Come dance with me, I can give you what you need."

"What exactly do I need Lady Bridget?"



The aging aristocrat ran her sleazy eyes up and down Jo's body. "Someone to show you what love between women is like. I would like to teach you." Lady Bridget said running her hand over Jo's hip.

"Please don't touch me!"

"Don't be a fool, I've set my sights on you east end girl, and I always get what I want!"

Billy, who had been watching these scenes from across the room, bounded over and grabbed Lady Bridget's arm.

"Take your hands off Miss Stafford now!"

"Who are you? Ah Billy Boyd! The music hall star, go get your own girl for the night Billy, this one's taken."

"Yes by me! Do you really want to take me on Bridget? We could take this outside." Billy stood at her full height looking down on Lady Bridget by a few inches.

"No! Of course no need. Why didn't you just say you were Billy's girl? No hard feelings eh?" She said looking like a frightened rabbit.

"I'll eh...just go join my friends then."

"You do that."

"Thank you Billy. She was a sleazy old woman." She said as she hugged herself shivering.

"Here have a drink." Billy grabbed two glasses of brandy from a passing maid.

"Thank you. I'm not very good with at handling aggressive people."

"You've always done well at putting me in my place Jo Jo."

Jo smiled. "You are never aggressive and you don't make me feel uncomfortable." She said shyly.

"Lady Bridget's always targets young women. She preys on them. Don't worry; I was keeping an eye on you. I haven't seen you dancing?"

"No I didn't want to dance with any of them. I don't know why, but today brought a lot of memories back for me. I used to have such hopes for love. I always dreamed of what the Dalton's and the Woodward's have."

"Are you talking about the woman who hurt you?"

"Yes. I was played for a fool, but I don't want to talk about it. It's supposed to be a celebration."

"Who ever made you feel like that is a fool! Well listen, you know where you stand with me. I irritate you, I annoy you, I drive you crazy apparently, but you know you are safe with me. Always."

Jo laughed.

"Yes that's true. I would always be safe with you."

"Would you do me the honour of dancing with me Miss Josephine?"

"Yes, yes I will."

Billy led her to the floor.

From across the room Alex, Beth, Poni and Lotty observed the young couple dancing.

"Billy is making progress." said Alex.

"They are so sweet aren't they?" Lotty asked.

Poni turned to Beth. "Enough romance for one day! Lady Beth would you do me the honour? May I steal your wife Alex?"

"As long as you bring her back old friend. Shall we join them Lotty?"

"Oh I think so. Let's show them how it's done."

The six friends danced into the night. Alex, Poni and Billy dancing with all the ladies. Alex even had little Kat up on the floor before she was taken to bed.

Billy stayed by Jo's side all evening. At one point they were talking on the balcony, as it was too hot in the ballroom. They were deep in conversation when a blonde young woman came up and tapped Billy on the shoulder.

"Hi Billy, I'm such a fan. I saw you perform at the Albert hall."

"Oh yes, thank you." Billy was embarrassed and just wanted to get rid of the woman.

"Will you dance with me?"

Jo was enraged with jealousy.

*How dare she! For all she knows I could be her girl and she's just making eyes at Billy right in front of me!*

Jo thought.

"I can't right now. Sorry." Billy replied.

"Oh come on, it's not like your with a lady friend, I know you don't have one. I can make it worth your while?" The young Blonde trailed a finger down her shirt front.

"I'll wait in the ballroom."

Jo had enough. She watched the young woman walk off, hips swaying.

"I'm sorry...." Jo cut Billy off.

"Don't be sorry. Go and do what you do best."

"What are you talking about? I don't want to go; I want to stay with you. We're having a good time." Billy was annoyed.

"You didn't say no the second time she asked. I saw the way your eyes followed her hips into the ballroom."

"Are you insane? I've spent the whole evening dancing with you and our friends. Have I not shown you I want your company?"

"You could have said I have company at the moment or something, and she obviously has heard your reputation for entertaining the ladies so off you go and do your duty!"

Billy could believe this reaction. It seemed to be pure jealousy.

*Does she really care for me that much? I tried to brush off that woman. Why is she trying to push me into this woman's arms? I've spent all evening giving her attention, dancing with her, bringing her drinks. I thought we were getting somewhere. I was obviously wrong.* Billy thought.

"No matter what I do it's never good enough is it? I actually thought you were beginning to see the real me, not the one all the fans see. I was obviously wrong! Well if you think that's what I am, then I'll go and be what you think I am!"

Billy stomped off into the ballroom, but not into the arms of the blonde. She went to the other side of the room, There she got herself a whiskey and lit a cigarette. The Anger was rolling off her.

The Woodward's and the Dalton's observed Billy marching from the balcony in a foul mood.

"Ah it was all going so well!" said Poni.

"We better go and speak to Jo, Lotty." said Beth.

"Alright sweetheart we'll have a word with Billy, but remember we were going to slip away soon." Alex reminded her wife.

Beth smiled shyly. "I remember. Meet me in twenty minutes darling."

The two women made their way out to the balcony. They could see Jo had been crying.

"Jo, come inside, you'll catch your death out here." said Lotty.

She followed them in and Beth said. "What happened? You were getting on so well."

"We were. I thought just for a moment, that I could trust her then this young fan came out offering her a night of all sorts. Right in front of me and I threw a jealous fit. Told her to go and do what she does best."

"Did she give the girl encouragement?" asked Lotty.

"No. She said she wanted to stay with me, but I was angry I pushed for away, so she said if that's what she thought of her then she would go and be what I thought she was. I know I was just jealous, but I'm just admitting to myself that I like her and a then her womanising reputation comes up and drives a wedge between us."

Beth knew what that felt like. When she had met Sally Weston, she felt helpless.

"Billy may have been like that Jo, just like Alex was, but I know she wants to do things differently with you. You can see it in her eyes when she looks at you. Oh and she didn't go into the arms of that blonde, she went straight over the other side of the room and is currently drowning her sorrows in a whiskey bottle." Beth told her.

Then Lotty added. "The next time you see her, tell her you want to start again. I know you can trust her."

Jo wiped her tears. "Alright I will."

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"Billy you can't dance round her forever. Take the bull by the horns." Alex told her.

"I will, I have to. She's driving me crazy!"

"Alright then now my wife and I are going to slip away. Poni, can you make sure everyone one leaves alright?"

"Of course, go and enjoy you night."

Billy smirked and said. "If you need any pointers you know where I am!"

"Very funny and Poni make sure no one disturbs us unless the house is on fire."

"Will do, now go and get your wife."

Alex walked over behind Beth and kissed her neck. "Are you ready little bit?"

"Yes darling, good night everyone." She kissed all her friends and allowed Alex to lead her away. Her heart was pounding.

*There's no turning back now!* She thought.

Poni, Lotty and Billy and Jo watched them leave.

Poni said nuzzling into her wife's hair. "I hope this lot leave soon. I think we should relive our wedding night."

"Poni boy! If you'll excuse us both, I think we'll just have a final dance before the guests leave." Lotty giggled as Poni grabbed her bottom as they made their way to the floor.

Billy and Jo were left alone. Jo went to speak, but Billy silence her by taking her in her arms and saying. "No. Listen to me Jo Jo. I have had enough of all this. I'm here and I care. I know we have known each other long, but when I first looked into your eyes in The Alley Cat, and you've been all I can think about. That never happens to me, and I want to find out what that means. You just have to trust me that I won't hurt you intentionally. Tomorrow after breakfast you're going to meet me for a walk around the grounds, and then when we go back to London I'm going to take you for dinner. I'm going to court you. Understand?"

Jo quite shocked at Billy's forcefulness just nodded.

"Good." She leant over and placed the lightest of kisses on her lips and pulled away.

Jo still had our eyes closed; the jolt of electricity she had felt when their lips touched left a tingling sensation.

"Now we're going to dance." Jo smiled and allowed herself to be pulled to the floor.

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The newlyweds entered Alex's bedroom, now their bedroom. Alex went straight over to the chair and placed her suit jacket over the back and began losing her tie.

"That was some day wasn't it? I couldn't have hoped for a better day."

When she got no response she turned to find Beth stood at the door, stiff and frightened looking.

"Are you alright, sweetheart? Is it the room? I know it's rather old fashioned and dark looking, but you're going to decorate it with Lotty when we get back from New York."

It was a very large masculine looking room. The furniture was all heavy dark oak, but it was very comfortable, along the back wall stood the large four poster bed, which looked like a one from a fairytale.

"It's not that, it's.....well this is it, our wedding night."

Alex finally understood and walked over to her new wife.

"Look, we've slept together lots of times, and this doesn't have to be any different. If you're not ready, I can wait. You're my wife now and that's what I've always dreamed of, we have a lifetime of nights ahead so we can wait if that's what you want. I just want you to be happy and comfortable." Alex said stroking her cheek.

"I do want it darling and I don't want to wait anymore. I'm just really nervous that's all. I don't want to disappoint you."

"You could never disappoint me. Just being allowed to touch would fulfil me in more ways than I could describe, but how about this, we go and get ready for bed, just like we do when we stay at the London flat. Then we'll just lie in bed and talk, and whatever happens happens, but there's no pressure. What do you think?"

Beth smiled. "You're so understanding, darling. I feel better already. Eh... I'll go into the bathroom and get ready; I got a something nice for our wedding night."

Alex gave her head a kiss. "I can't wait. Off you go then." Giving her smack to the bottom.

Alex got herself changed, wearing her usual white vest and boxers. She splashed on a little aftershave and lay down on the bed, waiting for her wife.

Alex read a brochure on the Queen Elizabeth while she waited, but eventually heard the bathroom door open.

She turned to see Beth standing in a creamy satin negligee. Alex's heart started to thump in her chest.

"You look stunning." Alex patted the bed to encourage her to lie down beside her.

Beth got under the covers and they lay side by side, Alex's hand went naturally to stroke her wife's hip.

"Mmm. I like this; it's so soft and silky."

"Darling, we've never talked about what you like. Em....Lotty explained to me about some things." Beth said nervously.

Alex smiled. "It's so sweet how shy you are, things about making love?"

"Yes...eh...making love. When I asked her what it was like, she said it could be like anything you wanted it to be, that was what was special about being with a women."

"That's true. What else did she tell you?"

"Well that sometimes, Poni liked to make love the way a man did. She didn't know for certain, but she thought you would be like that too."

"Yes. I like to make love like that, as well as many other ways. Well, it's the way I've always had sex, I've never made love before and that's what I'll be doing with you."

"S...so how do you do it?"

"I didn't want to use it the first time with you. I wanted it to be gentle."

"Will you show me at least?" Alex smiled at her shyness.

"If you want, let me go to the bathroom and put it on." She gave Beth a quick kiss and jumped off the bed; she stopped at the wardrobe to retrieve a bag then headed to the bathroom.

Beth was nervous and excited at the same time. She was desperate to know what Lotty had been talking about.

She didn't know what she was expecting, but she didn't notice anything different when Alex returned, but then as she drew closer she noticed the bulge in her boxers.

Alex lay down where she been previously.

It gave Alex such a rush to even be wearing her cock in the presence of Beth; the thought of using it on her wife blew her mind.

"You have it on?" Beth asked, the excitement telling in her voice.

"What's it called?"

"Well it's called a dildo, but I call it my cock. It's made of rubber."

Beth's heart was beating fast as she found her hand reaching out to touch it through Alex's boxers. Alex moaned at the touch.

"You can feel that?"

"Yes, when I have it on, it feels like part of me and when I use it, it rubs against me, that's how I get my pleasure."

Suddenly Beth was thinking of all the times Alex must have done this to other women and she felt immature and childish at Alex's softly approach to her.

Alex saw the flash of pain across her wife's face and knew she had been an idiot.

"Sweetheart I'm sorry. I should have explained when we became close, I threw out the one I had been using and bought a new one, I bought a couple in fact, new for married life. I can't change who I was, but I'm only yours now, forever."

"Kiss me Alex. Kiss me everywhere."

"Your wish is my command little bit."

Alex took possession of her lips, gently at first, but then as she felt Beth respond, she became firmer, her tongue seeking entrance to Beth's mouth.

They still lay side by side, Alex started to stroke gently down Beth's side, her hand brushing past the side of her breast.

Beth moaned into Alex's mouth, her nipples tightened and she felt a deep throbbing in her groin.

The younger woman let her hand caress Alex's shoulder and slip under her vest. She loved the feel of her partner's muscular back.

Alex felt Beth jump when she slipped her hand under her negligee and onto her hip. She pulled her lips away.

"Are you doing alright sweetheart?"

Beth's eyes were half closed as she replied. "Hmm. Yes, it feels so good when you touch me."

She opened up her eyes fully and the look the hungry look that Alex gave her made her mouth go dry.

She lifted her hand and stroked Alex's face. "I'm ready. Make love to me my lord."

Alex growled and pulled herself on top of Beth. She began to gently kiss and bite her way down her wife's neck.

Beth held the back of her partners head, encouraging her on. "Mmm. Oh! I like that darling."

The older woman nibbled and bit as hard as she dared, since the young woman seemed to like it, her attentions would leave a few marks for tomorrow.

Alex slowly brought her mouth lower. Teasing her wife's nipples through the silk of her negligee.

"Oh Alex. Ugh...that's so good. Harder! Please?"



"Take this off!" Alex commanded. Beth wriggled out of it with her partners help.

The older woman looked down at the beautiful pert body beneath her. Beth had a petite feminine body, curvy hips and full breasts, and her mouth salivated at the thought of taking them in her mouth.

"I have dreamed of these breasts sweetheart."

"There yours now." With a growl Alex took a nipple in her mouth, while her other hand squeezed the neighbouring breast.

"Ugh. Yes! Please let me feel you as well darling."

Alex released the nipple and pulled her vest and boxers off. They both moaned as their bodies came together. Beth's legs parted naturally to allow Alex between her hips.

Alex restarted her attentions on Beth's breasts. Taking each nipple between her teeth, pulling and biting.

"Mmm. So good darling."

Alex moved down and kissed her stomach. Beth's breath hitched as her partner kissed in and around her navel.

The older woman couldn't get enough of Beth's luscious body and when her lips arrived at the curve of her hip, she could smell how ready Beth was.

"Oh Alex! I need....need something, I don't know what, but I think I'm going to explode."

"Don't worry sweetheart. I'm going to take care of you, first I need one taste then I'll make you mine."

"Yes yours. All yours."

Alex kissed the inside of her wife's thighs, Beth's head popped up in panic. "What are doing darling?"

"It's all right sweetheart. I'm just going to kiss you and taste you. It'll feel good I promise."

Alex parted her folds and saw the wetness that was waiting for her.

"Oh little bit, I am going to taste you."

At the first touch of her tongue, Beth moaned deeply and grasped the back of Alex's head.

"Oh yes darling that's so good. Ugh!" The pressure in her groin was building and they both felt Beth's hips begin to move in rhythm against her tongue.

As Beth's moans were getting louder, Alex decided to retreat from giving direct stimulation around her wife's clit, and began teasing and licking around her opening.

Alex moaned as she lapped hungrily at Beth's wetness.

"Alex! What are you doing to me?" Beth raised herself up on her elbows, desperately trying to watch her partner deliver these new sensations to her body.

Alex tested her wife's desire for penetration by gently fucking her with her tongue.

Beth tried to push her partner's head harder into her need. "Harder my Lord, I need more!"

Alex then knew her girl was ready. She pulled away and climbed back up Beth's body, kissing her so that she could taste herself.

"Alex please, make me yours. I want you inside me."

"I'm going to little bit. I love you so much. I want you to keep your eyes looking into mine, no matter what. I want you to see me loving you."

"Will it hurt?"

"Only for a moment, just keep looking into my eyes."

Alex parted her wife's legs and reached down to place her cock at Beth's entrance. She started to rub the tip of the cock up and down her length, teasing Beth's clit and slipping a little bit into her entrance.

Alex rocked her hips very gently, because Beth was so wet the head slipped in quite easily. Both moaned as they came together. Alex pushed in a little further each time she gently thrust, until she met resistance.

"Beth, keep looking into my eyes. I love you."

"Yes darling, I want everything, come inside me!"

Alex thrust a little harder, trying to make it as painless as possible, one more thrust and she broke the barrier of her wife's innocence.

"Ah!" She had felt one tearing pain and then only the pleasure of taking Alex deep inside.

She locked her legs round Alex's waist, trying to get her as deeply inside her as possible.

Alex was in heaven, thrusting harder and faster inside her wife. She looked down into Beth's eyes.

"Oh yes...love...you." Alex moaned. To be deep inside the woman that she loved like this was unlike anything she had ever felt. Beyond pleasure, to a place where only their love existed.

"Don't stop darling, please, harder. Oh no! I'm not sure what happening. Alex!"

The throbbing and pulsing that Beth had been feeling, grew and grew until she knew she was clawing and grasping at her partners back.

"Let go sweetheart. I'm here; I'll take care of you. Remember only I can make you feel this way. Let go."

The pressure built until she fell.

Beth suddenly went still for a few seconds, and then pleasure exploded inside her like a white heat. She clawed at Alex's back as she screamed her name.

Alex's hard buttocks were thrusting harder and faster as she heard her wife's orgasm, she was only moments behind her.

"Oh fuck!" Alex moaned.

Beth breathing heavily and still feeling the aftershocks of her orgasm said,

"Yes, come deep inside me."

"Tell me....ugh...tell me your mine!"

Beth whispered in her ear "I'm yours, only yours forever my lord."

Two more thrusts and Alex felt herself explode into her wife.

"Fuck!" she called out and then collapsed, gasping for breath.

Alex shook with emotion and clung to Beth tightly. She's never felt this vulnerable before.

"Love you sweetheart. Don't ever leave me."

Beth was amazed how fragile Alex could be, whenever her heart was involved.

Alex lifted her head and stroked Beth's face. "Are you alright little bit? Did it hurt much? Look at me getting all emotional when it was your first time."

"I'm wonderful, it was the most loving thing I've ever felt; it only hurt for a second then it was wonderful. It wasn't just my first time darling; it was your first time doing this with love. Will it always be like this?"

"I hope so; I've never felt anything like that before. It took my breath away. I love you so much little bit."

"I love you too darling. I'm going to love being your wife; can we do this every day?" Beth smirked cheekily.

"Oh I think that's going to be a certainty sweetheart. You might be a little sore down there."

Beth hissed as Alex pulled out.

"I must say I like your....your..." Alex laughed at her innocent wife, struggling to articulate the new found aspect to their relationship.

"Well there lots of new things I'm going to teach you. I'm glad you like it. Some women don't like that sort of sex at all. I think were perfectly compatible."

"Yes, I think we might be." Beth snuggled into her big partner's side.

"I'm sorry about my language. I get a little vulgar when I feel like that."

Beth leaned up on her elbow and looked down on Alex. "Don't apologise. I think I like you talking like that when we're making love."

"Oh you do, do you? Well I'll have to remember that. I think you're going to be a bad girl in bed. The quite shy ones always are."

"Oh they are? Well, you'll just have to find that out on our honeymoon won't you?"

"I will take great pleasure in it." Alex looked at the bedside clock.

"It's half past 2. We better get some sleep, we're up early tomorrow. I'll just go and wash up. Won't be long."

Five minutes later Alex returned to bed. She spooned into the back of her wife, skin to skin. Beth took Alex's arm and pulled it up between her breasts.

"Thank you for making me so happy. I love you my lord. Goodnight."

"It's you that has given me the world and saved me from myself. Goodnight my wife."

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Beth became semi aware of a tugging sensation. As she became more aware, she groaned at the feelings deep in her groin.

"Oh!" She forced her eyes open to find Alex making love to her breasts.

"Darling, what are you doing?"

"Well. I woke up with my head right here between these delicious beauties and they just begged me to kiss them and suck them." Alex teased her nipple with her teeth, licking all round the aureole.

"They begged you?" Beth asked sarcastically.

"They did! They said bite me Alex. We want your mouth all over us!"

Beth grabbed a pillow and smacked it off the back of Alex's head giggling. "You are such a buffoon my lord!"

"Seriously sweetheart do you know how long these breasts have tormented me?"

"Tormented you? How?"

Alex with a roughish glint in her eye came up to kiss her. "Yes tormenting me, when you would bend over my desk and I could see right down your blouse, straining to get out when you would wear your tight jumpers. Not to mention this peachy bottom!" She brought her hand down hard to smack her and Beth moaned.

"Hmm. I like it when you do that."

"I like it when you moan like that. Now their mine, they can't torment me anymore. I can touch *kiss* taste *kiss* and bite when I want." Alex trailed her hand down to her mound and squeezed gently.

"Darling Laura will be up with the breakfast tray soon. We don't have time. Oh!"

Alex parted her folds and her fingers found only warmth and wetness.

"Are you sore after last night?" Alex asked while stroking her.

"Oh! Yes, it just stings a little."

"Don't worry I won't go inside." Alex split her fingers around Beth's clitoris and stroked her gently.

"Oh God Alex! What are you doing to me?"

Alex smiled. "You like that?"

"Yes.....it's different, different from last night. Oh don't stop, please."

Alex kept up the gentle rhythm while kissing her and whispering I love you's into her ear.

"Just enjoy the feelings little bit then let go. I love you."

Beth felt herself drowning in sensation. It wasn't the passionate explosiveness that they shared last night. It was as if Alex were gently coaxing and lifting her to a place of love and contentment. She felt herself approaching the edge. Beth threw her hands round Alex's head and pulled their lips to her own and stifled her wife's passionate cries.

Alex pulled her lips away as Beth regained her breath, she brought her fingers, still coated in Beth's essence, into her mouth and sucked them clean.

Beth went to speak; she had never seen anything as erotic, but Alex put her stopped her with her fingers.

"Shh!" Alex said softly.

"I just want to look at you. I have never seen anything more beautiful than you like this, when your body release's its passion." Alex brushed Beth's hair from her forehead.

"You are my angel. You have saved me and changed my life. I will spend the rest of my days making your life the happiest and most comfortable it can possible be. You will be loved like no other. I promise you that, Lady Elizabeth Dalton, Countess of Sheffield."

"Oh Darling, I love so much, I think I might burst. I have never felt anything like what I have just experienced. It wasn't just pleasure, I felt like you were surrounding and invading my body with pure love. I have never ever known such happiness."

"I'm glad, it will always be so. Now!" she said smacking Beth's buttock again.

"We better get organised before Laura and Thomas get here."

"But what about you darling? Do you not want me to.....?"

"I'm fine little bit, but let me warn you, come tonight in our cabin I will be ravenous for you!"

"I will look forward to pleasing your every whim My Lord." Beth deliberately said, in a teasing voice.

"Argh! Oh you will pay for that tonight you little tease!"

Beth just realised what Alex had said earlier.

"Is Thomas coming in here to dress you? With me in here like this?"

"Are you insane woman? I would have to kill him if he saw you like this! No I have a dressing room through that door there." She pointed to the other end of the room. It has my wardrobes, chests of drawers, everything I need to dress. It was designed so my father could dress, leaving my mother in privacy in here with her ladies maid. At that time it was very unusual and highly unfashionable in high society for Husband and Wife to share the same bed. So the problem of the Lady of the house and Lords valet crossing, never occurred. My parents, though were desperately in love, and never spent a night apart. So my father turned that space into a dressing room. It has a servants door so that the valet can go straight in there and it leads into another bathroom so were not fighting over the same one. Laura will come in here and attend to you. I asked Mrs Mcklusey to

have breakfast brought to you in bed. I thought you'd be tired and perhaps a little shy of going down to the breakfast room."

Beth blushed. "Thank you for thinking of me darling. Will our guests not be a bit put out?"

"Not at all sweetheart. Once I'm dressed, I'll pop down and have breakfast with them. You take your time."

There was a knock at the door.

"One moment!" Shouted the tall woman as she jumped up and pulled her vest and boxers on. Luckily she had gotten up earlier and tidied away her strap on. She threw Beth's negligee over to her.

"Here put this on so Laura can come in." Beth scrambled to put it on quickly.

"Come in Laura." Alex shouted towards the door.

Laura walked in with a full breakfast tray. "Good morning m'lord, m'lady."

"Morning Laura." They both replied, as Alex slipped on a dressing gown.

Laura placed the breakfast tray on Beth's lap.

"This looks wonderful Laura. Thank you."

Laura smiled. "I'll run your bath while you eat your breakfast m'lady. Thomas is waiting for you in your dressing room m'lord."

"Thank you Laura. I'll be right there."

After they were alone again, Alex came over and kissed her on the head. I'll get dressed and go straight down for breakfast. Just come down when you're ready. Don't worry about the luggage. Laura and Thomas will have most things packed already, but they'll see to it alright?"

"It's so strange getting used to all this."

"What sweetheart?"

"Things like not getting my own breakfast and not running my own bath. It seems ridiculous!"

"We all have our part to play Beth. Remember we discussed this? Would you deprive this people of a livelihood?"

"Of course not, it's just going to take some getting used to, that's all."

"Well I'll see you soon. I love you."

"Have fun playing with your rubber ducky my lord!" She joked.

"Very funny little bit. Enjoy your breakfast."

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Alex made her way downstairs, newspaper under her arm, whistling. She couldn't be happier. Newly married to the woman of her dreams and about to set off on her honeymoon. Life just couldn't get any better.

Foster was waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

"Good morning Foster."

"Good morning m'lord."

"Foster could you make sure Alfie has the cars packed and ready to go by ten."

"Everything will be ready m'lord. Young John will drive the second car for Thomas and Laura."

"Thank you Foster. I'll be in the breakfast room if anyone wants me."

Foster nodded and made off towards downstairs.

Alex entered the breakfast room to find Poni, Lotty and Kat, who was in her high chair, sat the breakfast table.

"Good morning Woodward's all." Alex bent down to give her little God daughter a kiss.

"Good morning Alex." said Lotty.

Alex looked up when Poni didn't respond, to find her best friend watching her with a smirk on her face.

"Oh grow up Poni!"

Lotty turned to see her partner's smirks. "Poni, may I remind you that you are not three years old! Kitten is more grown up than you sometimes!"

"Sorry." said Poni, thoroughly rebuked.

"Is Lady Grace taking breakfast in her room?"



"Yes, it takes her a little longer to get herself ready in the mornings. Is Beth getting ready Alex?" Lotty asked expectantly.

"Yes. Why don't you go up, I'm sure she'd enjoy the company?"

"Wonderful! I will." Lotty said jumping up.

"Poni make sure kitten ears up her breakfast."

"Yes dear." Poni sighed.

Once Lotty left the room, Alex stood up to go and fill up her plate.

"I suppose I'll have to do this myself this morning." Alex filled up on scrambled eggs, bacon and sausages.

"Kitten, eat your egg for Papi. Come on." Alex sat down and laughed as Kat dropped the contents of the spoon onto Poni's lap.

"I give up!" She gave her daughter the spoon to try and feed herself.

Turning to Alex she said "So how is married life so far old friend?" she waggled her eyebrows suggestively.

"I know what you are referring to Poni and need I remind you I am a gentleman."

"Oh come on Alex. Do you not think both our wives are upstairs, gossiping like old women, about you?"

"Perhaps. I'll shall only say. I'm deliriously happy and utterly in love and relaxed. She is.....em...? I don't know. Just perfect." She beamed.

"I'm so happy for you. I can testify there is nothing like being married, even when I'm getting into trouble!" She joked.

"Which is quite often?"

"Yes. Let me give you a piece of advice old friend. No matter who's to blame, you are always wrong and your wife is always in the right. If you just accept that from the beginning, your life will be a whole lot easier. It took me six months of marriage to work that one out!"

Alex laughed. "I'll try to remember that Poni." She said tucking into her breakfast.

"Where are our two young friends this morning?"

"They came down for breakfast early and went out for a walk in the grounds. Our young friend Billy put her foot down last night. After our little pep talk, she went to Jo and told her she was

going to dance with her, that they would going for a walk this morning and, when they returned to London, they would be going out for dinner. I'm told Jo simply went along with it like a lamb."

"You see sometimes ladies need you to take charge." Alex smiled.

"I bet you wouldn't say that if our wives were here!"

Alex laughed. "Yes, you're quite right. I hope things go well for them. They're a nice pair."

"We'll have them to dinner as we planned. Were only in Paris for a couple of days then I'll be back to take care of the office so we'll have them over to Grosvenor street. What time you leaving?"

"At ten o'clock. I can't wait to get underway and have Beth to myself."

"I bet you can't."

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Beth was sitting at the dressing table, Laura putting the finishing touches to her hair.

There was a knock at the door and Beth asked them to enter.

"Good morning, my dear."

"Good morning, oh I'm glad you came up."

Laura finished with her hair and said. "If that's all m'lady, I'll go and make sure everything is organised for your trip."

"Certainly Laura. Thank you"

Once Laura left the room Lotty said excitedly. "Well? How was your night?"

Beth came over and sat on the bed beside her friend. "It was wonderful! Magical! I was so nervous but you were right, it was just so natural and right. I've never felt such love."

"I can't tell you how happy it makes me that Alex found you. I think she's been waiting for you all her life."

"I hope I can make her as happy as she makes me."

"You will. I love your new clothes by the way." gesturing towards Beth's smart silver grey tailored suit.

"Oh there just marvellous. I've never worn things that are so fine and now I have a whole wardrobe full. I feel a little spoiled."

"Not at all. It's quite normal for a woman in your position." Lotty looked around the huge bedroom.

"I see we have a lot to do decor wise, when you come back." Lotty said.

"Yes, I think it needs lightening up. Alex says I should ask you to recommend a decorator and we can change anything in the whole house. She says it needs changing, a women's touch, that sort of thing. Well except her study, I think that will be her refuge."

"Yes. It does need some modernising. We'll set to work when you get back."

"Alex tells me you're going for a romantic getaway yourself?"

"Yes, a few days in Paris. I think my poor Poni is feeling a little in need of attention. I've been so wrapped up in the wedding planning, well let's just say I promised her my undivided attention and tender loving care, and she promised me some shopping!" They laughed.

"How are Jo and Billy this morning?"

"Last night Billy told Jo that they were going to a walk this morning and going to have dinner when they got back to London. Jo fairly melted at Billy putting her foot down. They are out just now."

"I hope it works out. They are such a nice couple. Jo deserves someone good to love her."

"She does indeed."

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Billy and Jo were walking down by the lake. They had only exchanged small talk, each nervous of the other.

"Thank you for taking a walk with me. I know my company tends to make you mad." said Billy.

"I think we make each other mad for some reason." Jo sat on a bench she passed by.

Billy followed her lead and sat.

The silence between them grew, each wanting to and unable to say so much.

"I...It was a lovely wedding wasn't it?"

"It was. I didn't think you would be into weddings." Jo said sarcastically.

"Why do you do that?!" Billy stood up angrily and began to light a cigarette

"Why do I have to do what?"

"Sell me short. I'm really trying here. I like you a lot, but no matter what I do you seem to think I'm some sort of cad. Just because I've been with a lot of women doesn't mean I'm a cad. I've never misled any of them. For the record I do like weddings, and for the record, what the Woodward's and Dalton's have, that's what I want. A family. I don't want to be running around nightclubs my whole life; it's time to grow up."

"You like me?"

"Yes, I like you." Billy sat down and looked directly into Jo's eyes.

"I like you a whole lot, but it won't matter if you don't let me get to know you. What happened to make you so angry?"

"Someone like you broke my heart." Jo turned away, the tears forming in her eyes.

"I didn't, and I won't. When we get back to London, I'm taking you out to dinner, just like we agreed last night. I'm going to court you, Jo Stafford. I'm going to court you until trust me." *And fall in love with me.*

Making her decision in an instant she said "Alright."

"Thank you. Now shall we walk back and wave the newlyweds off?"

"Yes lets."

They walk back arm in arm towards the house.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Dalton's were seen off by their friends and staff, earlier this morning. They had made good time and now pulled into Southampton quay, RMS Queen Elizabeth towering above them.

"Oh my goodness! Alex! Look at the size of it!"

Alex smiled. "Truly magnificent isn't she. Come." Alfie opened the car door and Alex helped her wife out.

Thomas and Laura exited the car behind them. "Thomas look at the size of it. It's like a mountain." said Laura.

"It is that Laura." He turned to see the baggage boys swarming around the Masters car.

"I better supervise this lot. Why don't you go ahead with the Master and Mistress?"

"Alright."

Alex and Beth walked arm in arm up the gangway, Laura following closely behind. Alex turned to her and said. "Stay close Laura. We don't want you getting lost."

At the top of the gangway, the first officer was greeting the first class passengers.

"Lady Dalton, Mrs Dalton. Welcome aboard. This is your steward Johnson; he will show you and your servants to your stateroom and help you with anything you may need in your time with us." He smiled, fawning over them.

"Thank you." they followed the young man deep into the ship.

The ship had three classes of passengers, First class, tourist and third class. First class passengers had access to completely separate facilities than the rest of the ship.

There was a first class lounge, smoking room, shopping centre, entrance hall, drawing room, long gallery, ballroom, dining room, starboard gallery, library and children's playroom. It was possible for the first class passengers to keep themselves insulated from the lower classes for the full trip if they wished.

They were finally shown into their state room. They walked into a large drawing room area, which had coffee table and writing desk, record player and all things you would expect to find in a drawing room at home. The room had three doors, two on either side, leading into the servant's quarters, and one on the back wall that led to their bedroom

Beth looked in wonder. The furniture and furnishings were sumptuous, highly polished wood and thick carpet.

Alex took a note from her wallet and gave it to the steward.

"Thank you Lady Dalton. We sail in an hour; it may take a couple of hours before we get your luggage to you. I will come and let you know, each evening when it is time to dress for dinner. If you need anything at any time just push the button over in the corner, and I'll be with you as soon as possible. There are also pull cords that connect to the servants rooms."

"Thank you."

The young steward left. By that time Thomas had joined them in the room.

"Thomas, Laura. We will mostly only need your services for dressing and such. Apart from that, and unless we ring for you, your time will be your own. Feel free to use all the facilities the ship has

to offer. And don't spend a penny of your own, anything you do or buy, charge to my room alright? Please feel free to enjoy yourselves."

The two young servants were all smiles. "Thank you m'lord."

"Not at all. Now our luggage will not be here for a while, go and get settled in your rooms or explore the ship. We will call if we need you."

Once they left Beth took off her coat, and began to investigate the state room.

Alex watched amused at the child like wonder her wife possessed.

"Little bit?" Alex said.

Beth turned to see Alex standing in that confident pose of hers. Hands in pockets, head cocked to the side, with that look in her eyes that made her insides melt.

She gulped. "Yes My Lord?"

"Come here." Alex commanded.

Beth trotted over. Alex stroked her finger down her cheek. "We're on our honeymoon at last sweetheart. I can't wait to get you back here tonight. Do you remember what I told you this morning?"

"Yes, you told me to expect you to be demanding."

Alex smiled mischievously. "That's right." Alex took her wife in Beth in her arms and kissed her deeply, causing them both to moan.

She pulled away before it went too far. "I love you." Alex whispered.

"I love you My Lord."

"Come, sit for a minute sweetheart." Alex pulled her over to the settee.

"I want to talk to you before we start going out on the ship. This is the first time we have been together outside our insulated circle at home. We will be mixing with rich powerful people on this ship. They will be too polite to say anything, but we may get some looks. They may not accord you the honour of new rank of Countess, but I want you to remember that legally you are a Dalton and if you see anyone looking down their long noses at us, you can most likely buy and sell everyone on this ship."

Beth considered this. "I can take it darling, as long as I have you. You know you've never actually told me how rich you are my Lord? It will help me sneer at them." She joked.

Alex laughed. "How rich **we** are. Well I don't have exact figures. My shares and investments change the totals all the time, but let's just say in the many millions, somewhere around One hundred and fifty Million."

"What!" Beth squealed, jumping up.

"Calm down little bit. I know it's hard to get your head around such amounts, but you can see why it is my life's work to help others. Our family will not have to think about money for many generations. There are many higher titled people than I in this country, but not many richer; I think only the Duke of Westminster is richer."

"Is coal mining and farming that lucrative?" Beth asked trying to catch her breath.

"Oh no, well I mean coal mining did make a lot of families like ours rich, but we came into a lot of money when my grandfather invested in an American steel company. The owner came to him looking for investment to set up a company in America. It turned out to be a very wise move as it became one of the largest companies in the world. Our family received a handsome return on investment, when the company was sold and we still own shares in the company, so we earn more and more each year. You can understand, I think why my father and then I believed in helping others. Have you heard of that famous quote from the philanthropist Elizabeth Fry?"

Beth shook her head.

"She came from a family of bankers and tried to help the poor and needy in the 1800's. She said, 'There is a moral obligation of those who have done good, to do good.' I try to live by that sentiment. We have more than our family could ever need."

"I can't imagine so much money. Lotty said you were the third richest person in Britain."

"Well perhaps at one time, I think I'm a little lower now. I don't keep track of such things."

"Now that I know this it makes me all the more determined to help you with your work. It's such a great responsibility Alex."

Alex kissed her cheek. "It warms my heart that you think that way, but let me worry about size of the money. You don't ever have to think about it. Just help me in my work as you already do and enjoy spending it. We are allowed to enjoy it as well. Alright?"

"It's so strange not having to think about money anymore. With my father, I was always worrying how far my housekeeping would stretch."

Alex stroked her cheek. "Well, never again little bit. Now I know we needed to have this talk, now we're married, but talking of money is so vulgar, let's order coffee while we're waiting for our luggage."

Alex stood and went to ring for the steward.

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Beth sat at the dressing table while Laura finished with her hair in the bedroom. Alex sat already dressed in her dinner suit waiting in the outer room, reading the newspaper to pass the time. Her jacket was being brushed down by Thomas.

"Would you like a drink will you wait m'lord?"

"Thank you Thomas. A whiskey please."

"Of course." Thomas went to the drinks cabinet and brought Alex her drink on a silver tray, along with the cigarette box. Alex took her cigarette offered her. She took a long drag and asked Thomas. "Are you taking Laura to the dining room this evening?"

Although Alex and Beth would be dinning in first class and enjoying the first class facilities, she had booked Thomas and Laura as tourist class, most servants would usually be catered for in third class, so they had been delighted to find they would be eating well and enjoying excellent entertainment.

Thomas blushed.

"Yes m'lord. I thought I'd take her dancing in the ballroom after dinner as well."

Alex smiled at the young man's bashfulness. Laura was a pretty girl and she was sure the young man had noticed.

"That's good. I wanted a word while we were on our own. I want you to keep a close eye on Laura while were on board and in New York. She is my responsibility and there a good many men on board who would seek to gain her attention. How could I face her mother when we return to the village if anything happened to her? Stick with her Thomas and make sure she's alright."

The young man beamed. "You can count on me m'lord. I'll look after Laura. We get on very well."

"I know. Now you know everything is paid for and if it is not then charge it to my room, but I want to give you this. Alex got up and went to the writing desk. She returned to Thomas and handed him an envelope. I want you to take this for when we get to New York. You will have a lot of free time when we reach the city, it's just a little spending money for some nights out, shopping, you know. Treat her well, buy her some nice things, have a good time."

Thomas took the envelope and opened it. It was a large wad of notes.

"This is too much m'lord! I....."



"Not at all Thomas. I'm happier than a pig in mud and I want to spread the happiness. I've seen the way you look at that girl. Enjoy yourself."

"Thank you m'lord. You really are too generous. I'll make sure she gets a few new dresses."

"Good, Good." Alex sat and lifted her whiskey and cigarette again.

"Are you sure you won't need us again tonight m'lord?"

"We will be fine. I've ordered breakfast to be delivered to our suite every morning so you two can just go and get yourselves breakfast, look around and come back late morning to help us dress."

"If that will be all then m'lord, I'll go and get ready to take Laura for dinner."

"Yes, I'll be fine. Although by the time my wife is ready, I may be starved to death!"

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Twenty minutes later, the bedroom door opened and the young blonde beauty emerged.

Alex stood and went to meet her.

"You look devastatingly beautiful sweetheart. Jo certainly knows how to design a dress."

Beth was wearing a strapless silver cocktail dress. She had on the simple jewellery Alex had gotten her on her birthday.

"I'm nervous darling; I've never been in first class in my life far less march in on the arm of the Countess of Sheffield."

Alex put her finger to Beth's lips.

"Shh little bit. I have some things that will give you confidence. I should have perhaps given you these on our wedding day, but I thought it would be a nice surprise on our honeymoon. Wait there."

Alex went over to a picture on the wall and pulled it. "What are you doing Alex?"

"Patience, sweetheart."

Behind the painting was a safe. Alex opened it and pulled out a locked case. She placed it on the writing table and beckoned her wife over.

As she unlocked the case she explained. "These have been lying in my family bank vault since sometime after my mother died. I had no need of them and to have them near would just have upset

me anyway. When we became engaged I got them out and sent to be cleaned. This is a small part of my mother's jewellery collection."

She opened the case to find four necklaces with matching earrings and bracelets. One was all diamond, the others a mixture of diamonds, emeralds, ruby and sapphire.

"Oh my goodness. These are simply stunning! Look at the size of these diamonds!" exclaimed Beth.

"This is only a small selection of her collection. It would have been a security nightmare to bring them all, so I asked Lotty to pick a selection she thought would go with your new gowns. The rest are waiting for you back at Dencotte. As my wife, the collection is now yours. Some of these have been passed down for generations. Some pieces my father bought her and you can be sure I will add to the collection for you. These used to have unhappy memories, but now they make me think of our future years together, with you looking beautiful wearing them." Alex saw the usual look of stunned shock on Beth's face when faced with wealth. She saw Beth about to open her mouth and pre-empted her by saying.

"I hope the words too much, expensive and you couldn't possibly are not about to come out of your mouth little bit. We've discussed this before and you are my wife now." She said firmly.

Beth smiled and said. "I was going to say, if you would let me finish my lord, that I am honoured to be able to wear your mother's Jewels and I hope I can do them justice. I told you, back at Dencotte, that I understood I'm your wife and I would start acting like it and try not to be fazed by my new life." She pecked Alex on the lips, who gave her a quirky smile.

"Well it will make a change if you don't fight me on everything I try to give you. I intend to spend the rest of my life spoiling you like a princess. Now which one do you think?"

"Em...the diamond one. Could you put in on me?"

"Certainly."

Alex took the necklace and stood behind her, attaching the jewels. Beth was wearing her hair up so the necklace sat perfectly on her neck and shoulders.

After fixing the clasp, Alex couldn't resist the pull of her wife's bare neck and starting to softly kiss her way down it.

"Hmm!" Beth moaned. "I love it when you kiss my neck darling. Oh....gives me goose pimples."

"Glad to hear it. You smell so good little bit. I'll do this some more when we get back, if I don't stop now, we'll never get fed."

Alex went over to get her dinner jacket while Beth put on the matching diamond earrings and bracelet.

"So do you think you'll be more confident with those on? I doubt many ladies in first class will have anything finer."

"I'll still feel nervous darling, but I have you so I'll be fine."

Alex came over with her wife's fur stole and draped it over her shoulders.

"Are you ready?"

Beth turned and straightened Alex's bow tie.

"As I'll ever be My Lord."

"Listen, you're Aristocracy now. We don't follow, we set the trend. No one will dare say anything, they might look, but that's all. They expect the upper classes to be a little strange. We'll be the finest looking couple there! Come on sweetheart, let's knock their socks off!"

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The newlyweds drew a mixture of both, disgusted and envious looks as they made their way down the corridors to the first class dining room. When they entered the room, the chatter and laughter quietened down as the other guests took in the sight of the unusual couple, Beth gripped Alex a little tighter.

Then as quick as a flash the head waiter was over. "Lady Dalton, Mrs Dalton, please follow me, we have a lovely table picked out for you."

"This is a beautiful room darling..."

Beth was surprised, the room wasn't as big as she imagined. It was a more intimate setting, the colour scheme white and gold. In the corner sat a white grand piano which played softly in the background.

Once they were sat down, the head waiter gave Alex the menu's and wine list to look over and promised to return shortly.

Alex looked up from the wine list, noticing her wife's nervous face.

"Sweetheart, relax." She reached across and covered Beth's hand.

"Dalton! As I live and breathe!" A short plump man approached the table.

"Piggy!"

Alex jumped up and shook the little balding man's hand furiously. He looked to Beth as if he was in his forties and had a bright pleasant looking demeanour.

"It must be a year since I saw you in London last, at the charity dinner organised by Mrs Woodward."

"That's right. It must be! Delightful to see you old chap."

"Are you going to introduce me to your delightful companion?"

"Dear Lord, where are my manners. Piggy I'd like you to meet my wife, Lady Elizabeth Dalton. Beth this is a dear old family friend, the Duke of Malbrough or Piggy as we know him."

The little man took her hand, kissed it and bowed.

"Please to meet you your Grace and do call me Beth."

"Only if you call me Piggy, Lady Beth." He smiled warmly at her.

"Well you've found yourself a very pretty wife Dalton. Never thought you'd settle down, but love follows its own rules and I see has captured you."

"It has indeed, and how are Lady Maude and the children?" asked Alex.

"Oh, marvellous! They're at home. I'm on my way to New York to escort back her mother. She does insist that she cannot travel by herself or she will be abducted by slavers and criminals! I ask you. But it makes Maude happy to have her mother so, anything to keep the ladies happy. Eh... Dalton?" He joked.

"You never said a truer word Piggy. We're on our honeymoon, on our way to see the sights and sounds of New York."

"Excellent, I did hear talk in London that you had gotten hitched, but you know what talk is. Still livening up the old aristocracy Dalton?"

Alex smirked in reply.

Piggy had seen the looks and whispering towards the young couple and seen Beth's nervousness.

"Lady Beth don't bother a jot about the stuffed shirts in this room. You my dear and old Dalton here are a breath of fresh air, I promise you. Well I better get back. Hope to see you for a drinky in the bar sometime old chap?"

"Absolutely Piggy. I'll track you down. Goodnight."

"Goodnight Piggy." joined in Beth.

"What a nice man darling! And a Duke? He seems very accepting of the way we live."

"Piggy and Maude are not stuffy aristocrats. The whole time Piggy was growing up he said he was going to renounce his title when he came of age. He was a communist, always preaching to all that would listen, the evils of capitalism. Then he met Maude, fell head over heels in love and decided the quite married life of the Lord of the Manor was quite the life for him. Maude shared his ideals and there always investing in one charity or another. They've helped us out a lot. I think their current cause is helping young male offenders. You can imagine that goes down just as well as I do in titled circles. We're birds of a feather."

"I'm glad to know it's not only the Woodward's and ourselves causing waves."

"Oh my goodness no! Surly you know all the blue bloodied Aristo's have a streak of madness running through us?"

Beth laughed.

"You are such a buffoon my lord!"

A waiter cleared his throat trying to gain their attention; he stood waiting to take their order.

"Could you give us a few more minutes please?" Alex told him.

"Of course, Lady Dalton."

"What would you like? Shall I order for us both little bit? "

Beth looked at the extravagant menu rather puzzled.

"Oh yes please. This style of food is still a little new to me."

"Of course." Alex signalled the waiter to return.

"We'll both have Terrine de Foie Gras Truffle, Creme de Celeri soup then Supreme of Halibut in Lobster sauce, followed by Poularde braise Darnidoff with peas and Chateau Potatoes. Em...For Salad we will have Salade de Saiton and Sweet we'll have Fresh Peaches Cardinal."

"Very good Lady Dalton, the wine waiter will be with you directly."

"Thank you and in the meantime could you bring us some champagne please."

The waiter nodded and moved off to get their order. Alex turned back to Beth, who had strange look in her eye.

*It was the same look she had last night while I teased her body!* Alex thought and swallowed hard.

"Oh My Lord I like it when you speak French." Her young wife licked her lips and said. "I don't think you'll get much sleep tonight."

"I'm counting on it little bit."

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After a wonderful dinner the young couple made their way to the first class ballroom. After enjoying a full meal and a few bottles of champagne and wine, Beth was feeling happy and talkative.

"I thought the food at the Alley Cat was nice but that was just out of this world darling." Beth said excitedly.

"I'm so glad you enjoyed it. We will have a lot of wonderful meals in New York as well. I can't wait to show you."

They entered the dim ballroom and were shown to their table. A female singer was crooning the newest hits from the states.

A waiter took the drinks order from Alex and brought them back brandy and a Martini, lighting Alex's cigar before he left. She looked round the room and they didn't seem to be turning as many heads as they were in the dining room. *They must have realised were not that interesting.* Alex thought.

"She's a wonderful singer isn't she darling?"

Alex smiled at her wife's childlike enthusiasm.

"Are there clubs like the Alley Cat in New York?" Beth asked.

Alex exhaled her cigar smoke then answered. "Oh yes sweetheart. I have a lot to show you."

"Well are you finally going to tell me what we are going to do, once we arrive?"

"Of course, you know I just like to keep surprises for you. We'll do all the usual sightseeing. Empire state building, Statue of Liberty, and lots of other places like that. We'll do lots of shopping, I want to go to Tiffany & co, on Fifth Avenue, and add something to your jewellery collection."

Beth went to protest and Alex just gave her that stern look that she loved so much, and said nothing.

"Thank you. Now as I said, I want to add something to your collection, to commemorate our honeymoon. It is a very special jeweller and I intend to give you something for each memorable event in our life."

Alex reached over and took her hand.

"You haven't had an easy life and you're now going to be spoiled rotten. That I can guarantee you."

Alex stubbed out her cigar and said.

"Come on, I want to dance with my wife."

Beth was swept onto the floor. They danced for several numbers, growing closer and closer. Beth shivered as Alex trailed her fingers down her back. Beth looked up at Alex, her eyes heavy and lust filled.

Alex felt herself grow aroused at the look on her wife's face and she knew she just had to have her soon.

She whispered in Beth's ear. "Let's go back to our room little bit. I want you so much."

She heard Beth moan at her words and nod her head.

They returned briefly to the table to retrieve Beth's stole and for Alex to leave money for the drinks.

They made it back to their room in record time. Alex took off her jacket and pulled at her bow tie until it was hanging round her neck.

"I'll just be a few minutes." Alex whispered in Beth's ear.

Beth shivered, knowing what her partner was leaving the room to do. "Shall I get ready for bed or do you want to stay up for a while?"

"Stay as you are. I'll just be a minute. Why don't you put on some music?"

Alex flashed her that cheeky grin that melted her heart.

"I will." She watched Alex's strong sturdy figure make her way into the bathroom. Images of their first night together flashed through her mind. Images of Alex lying on top of her, thrusting deeply inside her. She was instantly wet and started to throb.

*Who knew married life would be so fun!* Beth thought and she went over to the record player to choose some music.

Beth put on some soft jazz; she thought that would suit the mood. Alex came up behind Beth and kissed her neck. Her head fell backwards on to Alex's shoulder.

"Hmm. Your neck is delicious little bit. You like it when I do this?"

Alex grazed her wife's neck with her teeth then bit down a little harder.

Beth was drenched.

"Oh I love it." Alex ran her hands down Beth's sides, finally coming to rest at her hips. She pulled her wife's hips in tighter to her groin and Beth moaned as she felt the bulge in Alex's trousers.

She turned and said. "Darling I feel so much when I'm with you like this. I need you so much."

"I need you too; I've never felt passion like this in my life."

Alex reached round and slowly unzipped Beth's dress. It fell and pooled round her ankles.

As Beth stepped out of the dress, Alex lifted and draped it over the back of a chair. Beth was left standing in black bra, silk stockings and suspenders, lacy black knickers and her diamond Jewellery.

Alex stepped back and took in the sight of her young wife, standing before her with lust filled eyes, only for her.

"Oh sweetheart. I love to see you like this. You make me burn for you." Alex said as she started to undo her top shirt buttons.

Beth, buoyed by all the alcohol they had consumed, was feeling rather bold and stopped Alex from undoing any further buttons.

"No please, let me do that. Here sit." Beth guided Alex over to the chair and she sat, very turned on by Beth's more confident behaviour.

"I want you to sit and watch, but don't touch yet."

Beth stood before Alex and began to strip, starting with her jewellery, which she put safely on the sideboard. She then unhooked her bra, releasing her ample breasts, her nipples hard and begging for attention.

Alex watched the scene before her, her mouth watered at the sight of Beth's breasts being released from the lacy black bra.

After Beth was completely naked, she approached Alex, sat in her lap and began taking off her waistcoat and shirt. All the time Beth breasts were bouncing in and brushing Alex's face. Her hands naturally found themselves squeezing Beth's buttocks, while her mouth sucked in an already hard nipple.

Beth dropped Alex's shirt and waistcoat to the floor moaned. "I told you not to touch my lord!"



Alex responded by smacking her buttock and saying. "I don't take instruction well, I give them out."

Beth through her head back. "Oh! I love it when you do that, but please allow me to undress you my lord?"

Alex nodded and let her go. Beth slid off her lap and sank to her knees in front of her.

Alex watched as her wife, naked and on her knees before her, began to unbuckle her belt. She didn't think she had ever seen anything more erotic.

She stood to allow Beth to pull her trousers and boxers off. She saw the look of desire when Beth saw her cock standing, ready to both give and receive pleasure.

Beth groaned and had an overwhelming desire to take Alex into her mouth.

Alex looked down in shock at the sight of her innocent wife put her lips round her cock.

*On my god! How would she even know to do that? That I love it so much!* Alex wondered.

"Sweetheart, ugh! You don't have to do that if you're not comfortable with it." Alex said trying to give Beth the opportunity to stop if she wished, but her hips betrayed her as they started to rock in a rhythm.

Beth looked up and stopped her sucking action to say. "I want to do it. You like it don't you?"

"Oh yes." Alex groaned.

Beth then took her back into her mouth and began to suck. Alex's hands went to the back of her wife's head as her hips thrust into her mouth.

"Fuck! Alex moaned. "So good sweetheart, so good."

Beth loved it when Alex was this unguarded and raw. In day to day life Alex was so gentlemanly with her, careful and proper, but she had learned that in these intimate moments, Alex was passionate, animalistic and Beth loved it. She looked up from her position on the floor, and was engulfed in Alex's passion, her partner in ecstasy because of her. She stopped sucking, released the strap on with an audible pop and raised herself to a standing position.

She looked into Alex's heavy lidded, lust filled eyes and said stroking her cheek tenderly.

"Do you remember that night we stayed at your flat? I was a little tipsy and got carried away? You said when I was ready, I was to come to you and tell you I wanted you to fuck me?"

Alex nodded, remembering how, after a night out Beth come to her only had clad in her underwear, kissing her and teasing her but getting cold feet at the last minute, Alex had told her to come to her when she could ask confidently for what she wanted.

"Well I'm asking. I want you to fuck me my lord. Please, I want you to inside me."

Alex could only groan at her wife's brazen words. She scooped Beth up, and walked to the bedroom, kissing her wife deeply as they went.

Alex laid her gently on the bed and stood and watched, as Beth spread her legs and offer herself up for her partner's pleasure.

Beth looked up at Alex, who had a hungry look on her face. She looked like she wanted to devour her, and repeated the words she knew had such a strong effect on her love.

"Fuck me my lord."

Alex was undone and growled as she pounced upon her wife and began to devour her mouth, her tongue thrusting and probing its way in, all the while she was grasping and squeezing Beth's breast with her free hand. After making love for the first time and the noises she was making now, it seemed her wife enjoyed, if not rough but very firm treatment, of her breasts and buttocks.

"Please my lord, take me now! I'm yours and I need you."

The two newlyweds were caught up in pure lust and it seemed that Beth wanted tonight's coupling, unlike their wedding night, to be fast and furious.

*Oh no little bit. You'll need to learn you don't get what you want that easily!* Alex thought, and even though all she wanted was to plunge straight in and bring them both the pleasure they both desired, but it would do no harm, Alex thought, to exert her control and show her young wife that waiting can be a good thing.

Alex pulled back and commanded with that penetrating stare that Beth loved. "Turn over and get on your hands and knees."

Beth was a little unsure; but when Alex looked at her like that, she would do anything she commanded.

She looked back and watched as her partner's eyes devoured her body. Alex started to run her hand down Beth's soft back, and coming to her buttocks. She softly stroked her fingers across Beth's bottom, causing moans from her wife, which grew louder as she stroked down and past her opening. Alex could feel her wife was drenched with wetness. Much to Beth's frustration, Alex's hand didn't linger long at her opening and brought both hands back to her luscious backside.

"Alex please!"

"What is it little bit? What do you want?" She asked as she massaged her flesh.

"You know what I want. I want you!"

"You may be a little sore after last night. Are you sure?"

"Yes! I want you darling."

"You have to tell me. Do you want this?" She raised her hand and brought it down hard on her Beth's right buttock.

Beth cried out. It stung painfully, but it made the throb inside all the worse. Alex lowered her head and kissed the heated red flesh.

"Is that what you want?"

"Ugh! Yes! Both. More please my lord."

Alex thought she could come simply from her wife's words alone. It seemed they were very suited in the bedroom as well as in life.

"I'll always give you what you want little bit, when you ask me like that. Always remember I love you and everything I do, I do with love."

Beth nodded her head and was rewarded with three sharp slaps.

"Oh yes! Thank you my lord."

Alex could see Beth was dripping with wetness and she knew herself she couldn't wait much longer.

She took hold of her cock and rubbed it the entire length of Beth's wetness, teasing her opening. Beth pushed her hips back hoping it she could help it slip in.

Alex smiled watching her. *You're really ready aren't you sweetheart.* She thought.

"Ask me for it. You need to ask before I'll give you what you want."

Beth looked round, met her partner's eyes and said. "Please fuck me my lord. I want your cock!"

Alex groaned, and immediately entered her wife. She began thrusting softly and slowly at first, allowing Beth to become comfortable with this new position.

Beth hissed, she was a little tender from the night before, but the feelings were so good she didn't care. Beth was overwhelmed with feeling, this felt so different than Alex being on top of her. Every time her partner thrust into her it seemed to hit somewhere inside that sent waves of intense feeling through her body, her emotions were building inside her threatening to spill over any moment.

"Oh Alex! Don't stop! I love you, love you!"

"I won't stop sweetheart."

Alex knew she couldn't last too much longer. She gripped onto Beth's hips pumped her hips faster and harder.

She bent over Beth, needing to get as close as possible.

"Oh darling I can't hold on, it's too much! Too much!" Beth was almost weeping. Alex whispered in her ear.

"Come for me little bit. I love you. Let go, I'll be right with you."

That was all she need and she went over the edge with a scream as if in pain. Alex was right behind Beth, her rapid driving thrusts turning erratic as her orgasm rushed through her body and out of her groin.

"Oh fuck! I'm coming! I'm coming inside you.....!" She shouted.

Then she collapsed on top of Beth, gasping for air. Her brain had turned to mush and her bones to jelly. Alex kissed her wife's shoulder but then it suddenly filtered through to her addled brain that she could hear Beth crying. *Oh my God Beth! You pushed her too far!*

Alex turned her over and took her in her arms. She tried to wipe Beth's tears away with her thumb, but they kept coming in big sobs.

"Sweetheart? What...."

Beth gulped some air, trying to get her words out. "N.....no d.....darling. It's not you. I.....I have never felt anything like that. It was so intense. I just felt overwhelmed, I felt so connected to your heart. I felt like I was drowning in love. I'm exhausted now."

"I'm so glad it felt so good. That position can be intense." She kissed her lips lightly and stroked the side of her face.

"You have captured me, heart and soul little bit. I would die if you ever left me. I could never live without you, the very thought terrifies me."

Beth ran her hand through Alex's thick short dark hair and looked deeply into those impossibly blue eyes. Blue eyes that one minute could be all passion and lust, another icy, when those she loved were threatened and like now, when the vulnerability that Alex kept deep down inside, and only showed to Beth, only she knew the fragile nature of Alex's heart.

"Alex, I will never ever leave you, unless death takes me. I am your wife, you are my lord."

Alex regained some of her confidence and kissed her deeply. The kiss finished and Alex pulled away and looked deeply into Beth's eyes. "Your mine little bit. You'll always be mine."

"I will. Now cuddle me in tight you big buffoon and let's go to sleep. You've quite worn me out."

Alex laughed and said. "Gladly little bit. Come here."

"Love you darling. Goodnight."

They drifted off to sleep totally spent and extremely happy.

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Alex woke the next morning to her wife's blond hair tickling her nose. During the night Beth had managed to place herself, just about on top of Alex.

*This is heaven! What a way to wake up.* Thought Alex. She lay enjoying the feeling of having her wife in her arms and drawing lazy circles on her back.

"Hmm. Morning darling." Beth stretched, trying to wake up.

"Morning little bit. How's my beautiful wife this morning?"

Beth in playful mood wiggled herself over Alex's hips. "Your wife is a happy woman this morning. I love sleeping snuggled into you." Beth crawled up the big woman's body till they were face to face.

Alex lovingly stroked Beth's golden locks behind her ear. "Last night was amazing sweetheart. We fit so well together."

"We do." Beth began kissing her neck; Alex closed her eyes enjoying the attention.

"Alex?"

"Hmm?"

Beth went lower with her kisses, coming to her small breasts and licking the nipple she found there.

Lifting her head she asked.

"Darling, do you like this?"

"Umm! It's nice. I like it when you lick and bite my nipples; I've never let anyone, but you this close."

Beth knew she was on borrowed time before Alex flipped her over and took charge, and she was determined to have her way. Alex had fallen asleep with her cock still on last night, and Beth wanted it.

In-between the kisses, which had now reached Alex's stomach, she asked.

"Darling? Will you let me finish what I started last night? "

Alex's leaned up on her elbows; the thought of her what her wife had started to do last night began a pounding between her legs. "Are.....you sure?" Alex had been a little shocked last night when her innocent wife had attempted such an act.

Beth could see the hesitance in her partner's eyes. Beth knew Alex put her high on a pedestal and was reticent to treat her in any way like the women she had been with before. Having only been introduced to the world of lovemaking was determined to be a very apt pupil.

Beth wanted all of Alex's passion, and wanted to satisfy all of Alex's needs.

"I would love to give you pleasure with my mouth, the way you pleased me. Let your wife give you pleasure."

Alex moaned. "Oh little bit! You're driving me crazy! You're turning into a little vixen!"

"I have kept you waiting a long time, my lord and you deserve my undivided attention."

The young woman brought herself up on her knees between Alex's legs. Putting her very best demure look on her face and lowering her head she said.

"Tell me what you want me to do; I am yours to command my lord."

Alex grinned at Beth. *Little bit you are so good.*

Alex met her wife's gaze and said.

"I want you to start by taking my cock in your hand, and stroke it, gently at first."

"Yes my lord." Beth brought her hand down and started to stroke her length. Alex eyes were fixated on the gentle teasing her cock was receiving. Alex's breathing hitched as she watched Beth's manicured nails trail tantalisingly over the head of her cock.

Alex had experienced all kinds of sexual encounters. Some raw, some rough, some passionate, and she had experienced a myriad of both adept and novice lovers, but nothing could be compared to the brazenly erotic sight of her wife caressing her tenderly.

Beth looked up at her partner who was watching her with heavy lidded eyes. She then watched as Alex brought her hand to Beth's cheek, stroked it lightly then more firmly grasped her chin, and guided Beth's mouth over to the head of her cock.

"Open." Beth obeyed. "Lick slowly."

Beth moaned at the first taste of Alex, as she ran her tongue the length of her partner's shaft.

"Oh god! That's good sweetheart. Just like that."

Beth continued to lick and tease, swirling the tip of her tongue around the head. She could hear Alex's breathing becoming quicker and moans more frequent.

*That's right darling let me love you.*

"Take it in your mouth now."

Beth did as asked and hungrily took Alex into her mouth.

She felt Alex's hands come to the back of her head and began a slow thrust into her wife's mouth.

*Oh this feels so good!* Thought Alex, the sight of her cock bulging out of Beth's cheeks and the hums of enjoyment and slurping noises were speeding her towards orgasm.

Alex pushed Beth's head down harder on her "Hmm suck it! Oh yes."

The rhythm of Beth's sucking was getting faster and faster, along with her partners thrusts into her mouth.

"Oh fuck! Ugh that's it suck it!"

Alex hips were grinding her clit to the base of her cock, her hands keeping a tight hold of her wife's head as it bobbed up and down.

Beth heard Alex's breathing become very short. *She must be close.*

"I'm going to come Beth, I going to come in your mouth. Don't stop! Fuck!"

Alex tumbled over, calling Beth's name and every nerve in her body shattered.

Beth pulled the appendage from her mouth with an audible pop. "Ugh! Come here, come up here, please sweetheart." Alex gasped.

Beth climbed up the big woman's body. Alex pulled her wife into her arms almost too tightly, still struggling for breath.

"I love you, I love you little bit. You are my world." Alex said full of emotion.

Beth stroked her partner's hair, cooing and soothing her.

"Shh! It's alright darling, I'm here and I'm yours. Don't worry about anything, just feel."

*Oh my God that was so intense, how could I ever survive without her.* Alex struggled to calm down.

"God...I've never..... it was so intense. I've let anyone see me like this. It's hard for me to just let go. I promise I'll work on being more open."

"You're doing it right now darling. I feel so honoured that you let me see you like this. I want you to believe you are safe with me. I love you."

"I do believe little bit. You're in my soul." Alex to flip her over, but Beth stopped her.

"No darling just let me hold you till breakfast arrives. This morning was about you."

Alex laid her head on Beth's chest and let herself be held like a baby as she drifted off to sleep with a contentment she had never felt before.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beth was awakened by a knock at the door. "Breakfast!" the voice shouted.

"Oh no. We've slept in!" Beth shook Alex who was still dead to the world.

"Alex! Darling!"

"Wh....what?" She said sleepily.

"That's breakfast at the door and we aren't even dressed!"

"Okay! Okay, don't panic, you go into the bathroom and get washed up and I'll sling on my dressing gown and take the things in."

Beth hurried off to the bathroom picking up her negligee on her way. She got a quick wash and dressed in negligee, she peeked out the bathroom door to see Alex tipping the young steward at the door.

"You can come out now sweetheart."

Beth walked in and found the steward had laid a full English breakfast on the small dining table in the sitting room.

"Mmm. This looks good."

"Not as good as you. Come here little bit." Alex took her wife in her arms and lifted so her legs were round Alex's waist.

"Where are my kisses?"

"Right here my lord." They proceeded to kiss each other deeply and thoroughly.



"Hmm, this morning was amazing sweetie. I've never felt so in love. You know what the best bit was?" Beth shook her head.

"Falling asleep in your arms, I have never felt such a warm, cosy, loving sleep in my life. I could have stayed like that forever."

"Me too, this honeymoon business is wonderful."

Alex put her down and kissed her nose. "You'll get no argument from me! Let's eat before it gets cold."

Alex pulled out her wife's chair and got her settled then took her own.

"This seems very indulgent, sitting eating breakfast at sea, with silver cutlery and china cups!"

"There's no need to let standards slip just because we're travelling."

"Oh of course not my lord." Beth said cheekily.

"That's enough from you. Now what are we doing today?"

"I thought we agreed last night you could go to the gymnasium with Thomas and I am going to go shopping with Laura."

Alex played with her food, sad at the thought of being apart from her girl. *I feel like an idiot. You can't even leave the girl alone for one minute. I don't want to be away from my wife, why should I? I love her.*

Beth caught the sad look on Alex's face. "What's wrong darling?"

"Umm....nothing." Busied herself with her scrambled eggs.

"No tell me, there's something wrong."

"Ah...not wrong exactly, I just feel a bit foolish that's all."

"Why? You're never a fool darling."

"I...um. Can I come shopping with you instead of Laura?"

"You want to come shopping? Why?"

"I just don't want to be without you and I feel silly because I've never felt so?.....em dependent on someone else, after this morning and last night, you collapsed down my final resistance and I don't ever want to part with you." Alex said a little sheepishly.

Beth got straight up and came around, sat on Alex's lap and through her arms round her neck.

"Aw! Darling you're so sweet! You try to act all tough and macho, but you really are my big cuddly teddy bear!" Beth kissed her nose.

Alex looked at her with mock indignation. "Cuddly teddy bear? I think not!"

"Oh I think so my lord" Beth began kissing Alex's face. "Oh yes. My big *kiss* cuddly *kiss* teddy *kiss* bear."

Alex was lapping up the attention. "Well alright, as long as it stays between us."

"I promise my lord. All your secrets are safe with me. To everyone else you can be a scary grumpy old lord, but I'll know better."

Alex laughed. "We shall go shopping and buy.....what are we buying?"

"Well we promised Kat a model of the ship for a start and then who knows. It says in the brochure that the first class shopping area can rival some of the shops on Bond Street."

"We shall have some fun spending money then."

There was a knock at the side door.

"That'll be Laura and Thomas."

"Hmm. Give me a kiss quick." Alex obliged and gave her breast a squeeze.

"Naughty Lord! Now I'll take the bedroom and you can get ready with Thomas in the dressing room."

"Yes Miss." As Beth stood to let Laura in, Alex smacked her bottom sharply.

"Aw!"

"That's just to keep you going; I owe you more than a few kisses tonight."

"I can't wait." Beth smirked then shouted come in Laura.

\*\*\*\*\*

Later in the day the newlyweds sat in having lunch after a full morning shopping. Much to Alex's surprise, she had enjoyed herself or perhaps it was just spending uninterrupted time with her wife. They had walked around hand in hand, Alex refusing to let her go. They laughed at the silly things they bought, as Beth had decided they would bring back their friends back home the most garish tourist gifts they could find. So far the couple had found a lighter and whiskey glass, with pictures

of the ship on them for Poni and Billy, and they had bought a lovely model of the ship for Kat. Alex had noticed she got a few looks from some other passengers, but gave them her icy stare and it stopped them in their tracks, and Beth seemed to be oblivious anyway.

*My girl's even getting used to spending money without complaining! I can't wait to see her enjoy the shops in New York.* Alex thought.

"Darling do you think we can see the statue of liberty?"

"But of course sweetheart. We shall see everything. I can't wait to take you to breakfast. The breakfasts in New York are legendary."

"You know I like anything to do with eating my lord."

"There's a wonderful toy shop called FAO Schwarz, I would love to get Kat some toys there."

Beth looked at her thoughtfully. "You adore that girl, you love children don't you? We've never talked about that."

"Yes, I do adore her and no we haven't talked about it, and we should, but perhaps not here. When we get to New York and get settled. How about that?"

"Sounds fine. Fancy an afternoon nap?" Beth asked with a smirk.

"Oh my dear wife, what happened to that shy innocent girl I married?"

Beth giggled and said. "She was seduced into these lustful ways by a handsome Lord with a roguish smile!"

Grabbing her wife's hand Alex replied. "Well, let's get going before she comes back then!"

\*\*\*\*\*

The next day, back in London, Billy Boyd sat staring at the phone. It had been two days since they had returned from Dencotte, where she had gotten closer to Jo. Now here she was, staring at the telephone trying to pluck up the courage to call.

*What if she says no? I mean sometimes she seems really into to me and sometimes she looks at me like I disgust her. I have to do this though. I have to find out if there can be more between us because I can't get her out of my head. Right come on Billy! Buck up and make the call.*

Billy took a lit a cigarette, as she always did when nervous, and picked up the phone.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jo sat at her drafting table working on some new designs. Her large open plan loft room had a bohemian feel to it. Her bed was over in one corner of the room behind a screen. She had a small kitchen area with table but the rest of the room was given over to her work. Beside her drafting area was a large oak table covered in fabric, either left over from cutting or about to be cut. There were several mannequins, each in various states of undress. Some had blouses with the sleeves yet to be sewn on, or a dress pinned together ready for a fitting.

Jo was currently going through a mammoth drawing session. She had felt so full of ideas since returning from Dencotte. The lush countryside, the grandeur and romance of the house had all given her such inspiration and had left her bursting with ideas.

Her mind began to wonder, as she sketched out the evening dress that was taking shape on her pad.

Jo looked up at the book Billy had given her. She had no idea why, but Billy Boyd was scarcely out of her mind these days.

*It must be some cruel trick my mind is playing to try and torture me.* She thought.

She had seen a different side to Billy at Dencotte.

*Going to all that trouble just to give me that book. It can't have been cheap and she was attentive to me at the wedding reception. Perhaps she's just using all the tricks in the book, to prove she can get me, because I turned her down, but then when she was drunk, I thought I saw the real Billy, without the bluster and bravado, she was adorable.* Jo was torn from her musings by the telephone ringing.

"Soho 2651?"

"....Hi? Jo its Billy."

Jo was half shocked half excited that Billy had made good on her promise to phone.

"Hello Billy. How can I help you?"

*God! She's not going to make this easy!*

"Well, I said down at Dencotte I would telephone. I was hoping you would let me take you out?"

"Yes you did say that, in fact I think you told me you were taking me out." Jo smirked to herself, enjoying giving Billy hard time.

"Well I had to, you were being annoying!" Billy realising she was being caught up in their usual bickering, took a deep breath and said.

"Look Jo Jo, we said we would do this, now will you come out with me?"

"Where would you take me? The Alley Cat?"

"God no! That's for stuffed shirts like Alex and Poni. I want to show you the nightlife in the London I know. What do you say?"

"Alright then. What time shall I be ready?"

"Seven o'clock sharp. Oh and dress casual, you don't need a cocktail dress tonight. See you soon Jo Jo."

Billy put down the phone and clapped her hands together. "Yes! Now I'll show you Princess."

\*\*\*\*\*

Jo searched through her rails and rails of clothes. She didn't own a wardrobe, she had so many clothes that she had made for herself, she began to use the rails they had at Hartnell's.

"Hmm. Casual. What does mean really? Shall I still wear a dress?"

Although Jo was a young woman of the 1950's, her heart was in the 1920's. She grew up adoring the fashion and style of that roaring time.

She decided on a flowing patterned silk blouse and with black straight skirt. Her hair she tied back in her Familiar style, with silk scarf holding back her dark brown, shoulder length hair.

She heard a knock at the door and looked at her watch.

"Seven o'clock sharp. She is keen."

Jo opened the door to find Billy standing with a dozen red roses in hand. She looked over Billy from top to bottom and her heart pounded. She had never felt such excitement from the very look of another woman. Billy was dressed in Blue jeans, which were turned up at the bottom, with what looked like a black t shirt sitting under a black leather jacket. Her hair brylcreemed up in a duck tail fashion.

There was no doubt in Jo's mind that she was extremely attracted to Billy with her boyish good looks and charm.

"Hay Jo Jo! You ready to have fun?"

"Yes, are these for me?"

Billy looked down at the flowers. "Oh yes, for you." She handed them over.

"Come in a minute till I put them in some water." She beckoned Billy in.

"Sit down." Jo indicated the worn sofa covered in a throw cover.

Billy looked round the large arty loft room. It was very bohemian, but empty. *I think your lonely Jo Jo.*

"Nice place you have."

"Thank you. It suits me. Gives me the room I need to work. So what are we doing tonight?"

"We're going to a coffee house, for pizza and dancing. It's not any old coffee house. It's frequented by arty types. Writers, actors, play writes, designers like yourself. I'm surprised you haven't been."

"Well, I tend to keep myself to myself. What's the place called?"

"The Macabre, I think you'll like it."

"What a strange sounding place. Well I'm ready."

Billy bounced up opening the door for Jo. They walked down the stairs of the tenement building in silence, slightly nervous of each other.

When put on the street Jo said. "Wow what a car!" She remarked, looking in amazement at the red Cadillac convertible.

"I'm glad you like it. This is my baby." Billy said proudly.

"This is yours? I've only ever seen one in the American pictures. How did you get one here?"

"I brought it back with me after I toured America. Come on jump in." Billy opened the door for her then jumped in herself. From the dashboard she grabbed her sunglasses and put on the car radio, which was on a rock and roll station.

Billy turned to her companion and giving her the cheekiest grin she could said. "Let's roll Princess!"

"You really are a flash Harry aren't you?"

"Jo Jo, tonight you are going to have fun. I guarantee you!"

The car roared off down the street.

\*\*\*\*\*

They pulled up outside an unusual looking cafe frontage. The windows were blacked out and all the signage was painted in black, with the name 'The Macabre' picked out in white letters.

"This doesn't look too welcoming." Jo said as Billy came round to help her out.

"Wait till you get inside Jo Jo. It's great. Come on!"

Billy held open the door and Jo walked in to a dimly lit coffee house. The walls inside were all black with paintings of skeletons, gravestones and coffins adorning them. The sombre decoration was a contrast to the lively atmosphere. The cafe was packed. Booths went down each wall of the room. At the far end there was a small area where couples of young men and women were dancing to the latest rock and roll tunes blasted out of the jukebox in the corner. There was also a small raised stage where live music must have been played.

Billy smiled at the look on Jo's face as she took in the scene. "Not quite as stuffy as the Alley Cat eh?"

Jo said nothing, but simply shook her head. "Let's get a table Jo Jo."

Jo felt Billy's arm at her back, as she was guided to a booth. Billy was greeted as they went by some of the other customers.

Billy helped her into the booth then sat across from her. Jo observed the eclectic nature of the clientele. There were rockers like Billy, Teddy boys in their Edwardian style suits and some rather bohemian, artistic looking men and women.

Billy saw her looking around and asked. "What do you think?"

Jo smiled. "It's fabulous! Why the frightening decor?"

"The story goes that the bloke that opened the place, wanted people to have a good time celebrate life after the war years, so he made the place like this to remind people to live life while they could."

"What a great story. You don't normally see rockers and Teddy boys in the same place."

"Yeah all are welcome here. It's a great atmosphere. They have singers and bands a lot. I really like it."

They were interrupted by the waitress. "Alrite luv. What can I get ya?"

Billy looked at her date and asked, "Do you trust me?"

*What a question Billy. Do I trust you? I want to so much.* Thought Jo, instead of giving an answer, that would say a lot more than she was ready for, Jo said. "Go ahead and order for us both."

"It wasn't lost on Billy that Jo hadn't answered her question. *I'm going to earn your trust Princess. Believe me.*

"We'll have a pizza to share, and two coke floats sweetheart." Billy gave the elderly waitress a saucy wink.

Jo giggled as the waitress left them. "What?"

"You just can't help yourself can you? You have to turn your charm on women whether their sixteen or sixty!"

Billy leant back; her arm draped coolly over the back of the seat and put on her trade mark cheeky grin. "It's what I do."

Jo met Billy's eyes and said with a hint of resignation. "I know."

*You can't change who you are Billy. It's not in your nature. Could you ever be happy with one woman?*

\*\*\*\*\*

Billy watched as Jo delicately ate her pizza with a knife and fork, and sniggered.

Jo sighed. "What's so funny?"

"You, you're not in the Alley Cat now. You can't eat pizza with a knife and fork!"

"Oh and how does one eat pizza in the correct manner?"

"Watch and learn princess!" Billy grabbed a slice and with a growl tore off a large bite with her mouth.

"You're an animal Billy Boyd." Jo said with disgust.

Billy had devoured her slice in a few large bites and was now licking the sauce off her fingers, humming with pleasure.

"Hmm. If something's tasty, you've just got to get right in about it. Fingers, lips, tongue. Delicious!"

*Only Billy could flirt with me while eating a slice of pizza!* Jo thought, but as much as she tried to fight it, the passion with which Billy attacked her food was making her hot under the collar.

Billy knew the effect she was having. "See? You love it Jo Jo. You've never met anyone like me."



Jo smiled. She secretly loved their verbal battles. "You must be the most arrogant person I ever met!"

"Yeah! Ain't it great?" Billy flashed her cheekiest smile and Jo burst out laughing.

"I suppose it is."

Billy was pleased that Jo was taking everything in good humour. "So what do you think of the place?"

"It's unusual to the least, but it's nice change from the places I usually go too. Why have I never seen you at the Alley Cat before? I used to go quite often, not so much now, but I'm sure I would have noticed you."

"I've been in America for the last couple of years, playing clubs, theatres. I done well, but it was time to come home."

"Why was it time to come home?"

Billy ran her hand through her hair. "Em...I suppose I'd had enough of living out of a suitcase. I've made some money and now I want to put down some roots, settle down with a girl. I don't want to be like some of those old sad hags you see at the Alley Cat, sleazy sixty year olds chasing after young women, because all the good ones their own age have settled down and married long ago. I want what Alex and Poni have."

*I could just kiss Billy she's like this. No swagger or bravado, just real.*

"What age are you anyway? You look like a boy."

"Well thanks Miss. That's why the chicks adore me!"

"Billy, why do you always have to fall back on that flash Harry routine? Just be with me, be real."

"I'm sorry Jo Jo. It's just a defence mechanism." Billy reached over the table and took Jo's hand. I'm 29, the big 3 O coming later this year. I can't do this forever. Play around with women, and work in the theatre. I need more, someone to come home to, someone to love and to love me."

She looked deeply into Jo's warm hazel eyes, and gently stroked along her hand.

*Oh God! It's happening again. I'm falling for a womanising playboy! The thought.*

Their loving looks were interrupted by a young man, dressed similarly to Billy, who clapped her on the back and said.

"Hey Billy boy! Give us a song? Something we can really dance to."

"Sammy, I'm a bit busy her at the minute."

"Come on. I'm sure your girl would love to hear a song as well."

Billy looked at Jo, who smiled. "Go on then. Show me what a big star you are."

"Okay, only if you're sure."

Billy excused herself and made her way to the stage, encouraged by claps and shouts from the crowd.

She took her place at the piano and spoke into the microphone. "Hi everyone, I've been asked to sing for you. So let me tell you about my Rocket 88!"

Billy started playing the rock and roll song and stood to sing.

*You woman have heard of jalopies,*

*You heard the noise they make,*

*Let me introduce you to my Rocket '88.*

*Yes it's great, just won't wait,*

*Everybody likes my Rocket '88.*

*Baby we'll will ride in style,*

*Movin' all along.*

Jo laughed at Billy's tomfoolery at the piano. Jumping around, dancing and never missing a note on the keyboard. Couples jived on the small dance floor. People clapped and sang along, and by the time the singer had finished, the crowd was worked into frenzy.

Cries of "More!" and "Play another!" we're heard from the crowd.

Billy looked down to see the object of affections mailing and clapping. Buoyed by that reaction, she decided to press on with another song.

"Okay boys find a beautiful girl to dance with; we're going to slow it down a bit."

As Billy began to play the first few bars, she looked into Jo's eyes and said. "I'd like to dedicate this song to Jo Jo, thanks for giving me a chance."

*I wanna be loved with inspiration*

*I wanna be loved starting*

*tonight*

*Instead of merely holding conversation*

*Hold me tight*

*I wanna be kissed until I tingle*

*I wanna be kissed starting tonight*

*Embrace*

*until our heartbeats intermingle*

*Wrong or right*

The room seemed to disappear as Jo found herself lost in the dream Billy was conjuring.

She felt as if Billy was singing only for her and meant every word. Jo was falling deeper and deeper under her spell.

*I feel like acting my*

*age*

*I'm past the stage of merely turtledoving*

*(be careful, be careful*

*what you do)*

*I'm in no mood to resist*

*And I insist the world owes me a*

*loving*

*I wanna be thrilled to desperation*

*I wanna be thrilled*

*starting tonight*

*(love me, love me, love me)*

*With every kind of wonderful*

*sensation*

*I wanna be loved*

*I feel like acting my age*

*I'm past the*

*stage of merely turtledoving*

*I'm in no mood to resist*

*And I insist the*

*world owes me a loving*

*I wanna be thrilled to desperation*

*I wanna be*

*thrilled starting tonight*

*With every kind of wonderful sensation*

*I wanna be loved*

The crowd clapped and cheered when Billy finished, but the singer didn't hear anything, her gaze locked on Jo, she felt herself pulled back to her.

When she reached the table Jo said dreamily. "That was beautiful Billy."

Billy took her hand, pulling Jo to her feet. "Not as beautiful as you Princess. Let me walk you home."

*You're going to be my girl Jo Jo. I guarantee it!*

\*\*\*\*\*

They walked along the road, towards Jo's flat hand in hand.

"So....did you have a good time?"

"I had a great time Billy. I don't think I've laughed as much in a long time, than I have with you."

They came to a stop outside Jo's building; Billy stood nervously moving from one foot to another, hands in pockets. The tension between them was palpable. "Well....I.....em.....do I get to take you out again?"

Jo smiled at Billy's nervousness. She liked to see the famous Billy Boyd unsure of herself.

"Yes. I think you can. For all your bravado, you're not that bad really are you?"

"I can be real when I want to be Jo Jo. I promise I'm going to show you that I'm trustworthy and worth the effort." Billy, being brave took a step towards the designer.

Jo, feeling nervous at what was coming suddenly said. "Would you like to come up for a drink?"

Billy smiled. "Em...not this time. I'm trying to show you how good I can be, but I...can I kiss you goodnight?"

Jo gulped and nodded her head. She didn't know why she was so nervous, she had kissed women before, but Billy Boyd made her stomach tie itself in knots.

Billy leaned forward and gently captured Jo's lips. Jo moaned at the contact and her hands naturally found their way up the front Billy's leather jacket. She took hold of Billy's jacket collar and pulled the other woman closer to her. Billy teased Jo's lips with her tongue, gently probing into her mouth.

As Jo tried to deepen the kiss further, Billy pulled away. They were both left panting at the feeling of each other's kiss. Billy rested her head against Jo's and said. "I think it's time for me to leave, before I can't."

"Then don't. Stay with me." Jo slipped her hands underneath Billy's leather jacket.

Billy groaned. "That's not what you want. You don't trust me yet. I'm going to show you that you can. I want more with you Jo Jo."

"I want to trust you Billy. I care about you."

Billy lifted Jo's hand and kissed it. "I know. I'll telephone you tomorrow okay?"

"I'll look forward to it."

"Goodnight Princess."

Billy flashed Jo one of her smiles as she began to walk away.

"Goodnight cheeky chops." *Uh oh. You've got it bad Josephine. You were ready to make love. She's got you. Please Billy, please be all you say you are! My heart can't take more pain.*

\*\*\*\*\*

"Alex look! The statue of liberty!"

Alex and Beth stood on the deck of the ship as she pulled into New York.

"It certainly is. It's rather large isn't it?"

"Large Alex? It's huge, look at all the buildings as well. There so tall. This is nothing like England is it?"

It warmed Alex's heart to see her wife's face with such joy and wonder.

"This is just the start little bit. I can't wait to show you around. Come sweetheart. Let's get ready to disembark."

After the chaos of the ship disembarking the ship, the relative calm of the taxi was welcome. Beth's face had been glued to the window as they made their way to the hotel.

"Sweetheart look, the hotels up ahead."

The taxi pulled in front of the huge deco style building. The taxi door was opened straight away by the concierge.

"Welcome to the Waldorf Astoria Sir."

Alex got out and extended her hand to assist her wife. Beth had become strangely silent after exiting the car and looking up in wonder at the tall building.

"Are you alright sweetheart?"

"Yes of course. It's just a little overwhelming."

"Well let's get booked in, and then we can rest in our suite. Shall we?"

Beth took Alex's arm and followed her into the foyer of hotel, Thomas and Laura stayed and with the bags and instructed the bell boys.

They approached the reception desk in the grand foyer. Alex had used the hotel several times in the past and was known to some of the older staff.

"Lady Dalton. We are delighted to have you staying with us again."

The well-presented receptionist said as the couple approached the desk.

"Thank you.....eh?"

"Davies. Lady Dalton." He handed her a pen to sign the register.

Alex signed the book and said."Ah Davies yes. It's nice to be back in your wonderful city. I look forward to showing my wife all the sights."

Davies, using all his experience, put on his best smile so as to hide his embarrassment and displeasure at couple's personal relationship. He had seen many things over the years in his job. Things he had to turn a blind eye to, including distasteful and illegal activities, but when dealing with the rich and powerful, discretion was essential. He found the English aristocracy especially strange.

"Marvellous. I hope you enjoy all our city has to offer Mrs Dalton."

"Thank you very much." Beth was beginning to get used to everyone fawning all over Alex. *It's obvious why Alex always kept everyone at arm's length. How did she ever know if anyone was being genuine, or just interested in her position?*

"Bobby here will show you to your suite my lady."

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The bell boy opened the door to their suite and led them into the sitting room. The first thing Beth's eye was drawn to was a small table sporting two dozen red roses. She rushed over to them, bending over to inhale the beautiful bouquet.

"Oh my! These are beautiful!"

"Do you like them?"

Beth turned and grinned. "Was this you're doing my Lord?"

Alex simply smiled and nodded. Beth ran over to kiss her Lord. "Oh thank you darling. You're always so good to me."

As Beth cuddled into her chest, Alex saw the bellboy staring.

"Is there a problem?"

"Eh.....no...Sorry Lady Dalton, em...I'll just show you the other rooms and I'll leave you to it."

Alex tipped the young man and they were finally alone. Beth had tried very hard since becoming engaged and subsequently marrying Alex, to display an outward sense of decorum and respectability that the title of Lady Dalton demanded, but as soon as the bell boy left, Beth's natural exuberance poured out.

"Oh darling! Look at this place. It's wonderful! It even has a drawing room!"

Alex leant against the door smiling, watching Beth, arms wide, and twirl around in a circle. She loved to see the almost childlike exuberance with which Beth enjoyed new experiences. Suddenly Beth stopped and exclaimed, "Where's the bedroom?" She ran off in search of it.

Alex laughed as she watched her young bride, run from room to room, opening doors in the very large suite.

Finally Beth found the bedroom and disappeared inside. Alex could hear Beth giggling and shouting, "You have to see this darling!"

Alex entered the room to find her wife spread out on the king size four poster bed.

"Are you having fun little bit?"

Beth was out of breath from all the laughing and running about. "Look at this bed, this room. It's like a dream come true."

"I had hoped you would like it." Alex stood beaming at her with smile. *I would do anything just to see you smile.*

Beth looked up at Alex, looking down on her with hopelessly loving look in her eyes. Beth smirked and patted the bed seductively. "Would you like to come and lay with me my lord? It's very comfy."



*Why? My little bit is getting awfully confident. I think perhaps a lesson is in order.*

Beth watched as her beloved's loving looks gave way to a stern penetrating gaze that made her heart beat faster.

"I think my wife needs to learn that she can't always get what she wants, when she wants it."

Alex began to stalk towards her wife.

Beth gulped; she loved when Alex took this tone with her.

As Alex got close to her wife, she lifted her hand and stroked Beth's cheek.

"You are so beautiful." Beth closed her eyes and turned her face into Alex's hand, kissing the palm.

"Sometimes I look at you and I just can't believe your mine." Alex trailed the tips of her fingers down Beth's neck, a girl of goose flesh folding in their wake.

"I can't get enough of your touch. You make me feels things... things I never knew existed."

Alex lowered her lips down to Beth's ear and whispered. "I haven't even begun to teach you little bit."

Beth let out a low moan. "Teach me, my lord."

Alex let her hands stroke down her wife's sides until she grasped both of Beth's wrists. She transferred both of her wife's wrists into her one big hand, and held Beth in place.

"As you wish, remember everything I do, every time I touch you, it's is all about love. Do you understand?" Alex whispered in her wife's ear.

Beth nodded and answered. "Yes my lord."

"If at any time you want me to stop, just say Skylla. I won't stop for no or any other word. Do you understand?"

Beth felt like her legs were turning to jelly with every command Alex gave.

"Yes." Beth squeaked.

"Good girl."

Alex let go of Beth's wrists and suddenly became all business again.

"Now Thomas and Laura will be in shortly to unpack and set out our things. I think it would be proper if you stay here and instruct her. I will be in the writing room, making some arrangements for our stay."

Beth snapped out of her lust filled thoughts and was a little confused. "...but I thought..."

Alex silenced her with a finger to her lips. "Anticipation is part of the pleasure Lady Dalton. Now I think after our journey today we will eat in the suite tonight. If you will excuse me."

Beth tried to regain her senses as she watched Alex walk out of the room. *Anticipation? Well, you did ask to learn Beth. I'm such a fool, I can't wait!*

\*\*\*\*\*

Jo sat putting the finishing touches to her makeup. As promised, Billy had telephoned in the morning to arrange to take her out again this evening.

Jo smiled, remembering the normally cocky Billy, falling over her words. *Maybe she is right one. She is different around me.*

Jo looked at herself in the dressing table mirror as a darker part of her mind screamed, trying to make its presence felt.

*It's just another way of trying to get you into bed. Then you'll never see her again! She'll break your heart. They all do!*

"No! I won't listen. Billy is a good person. I know it!"

She heard a knock at the door and looked at the clock. "Half past six? We said seven o'clock? She's early." The flutter of butterfly's she always got when Billy was around, starting doing summersaults.

Jo jumped up, feeling as giddy as a school girl. She opened the door and began to say. "You're Ear...."

The words dropped away and she stared in shock at the person standing there.

"Wh...What are you doing here?"

\*\*\*\*\*

Jo found herself gripping tightly onto the door, as she looked into the face of someone she hadn't seen in two years.

Roberta Whitworth, the 4th child of Baron Somerset, stood holding a large bouquet of flowers.

The butterflies that had been excitedly fluttering around in her stomach had turned into a sick sinking feeling.

Jo repeated. "What are you doing here?"

"Is that anyway to talk to the love of your life?"

"Get away from me!" Jo tried to slam the door shut but Roberta stuck her foot in the door.

"Let me just have five minutes to talk to you. Please chicken!"

Jo shivered. The term of endearment that had once filled her with warmth and love, now filled her with dread.

"Don't call me that!"

"Jo. I will go once I have been allowed to speak." Roberta said rather sternly.

Much to her rational minds astonishment, Jo found herself opening the door.

Roberta strode in and put the much too showy looking flowers down on the table.

Jo watched as her former lover surveyed the room. Roberta was showing signs of age. She had been forty five when Jo met her at her first night out at the Alley Cat, but her age was even more

pronounced now. Her short curly hair had streaks of grey all through it now. Her once noble looking face looked a little sunken and drawn.

*No doubt from burning the candle at both ends as usual.* Thought Jo.

"This is a lot nicer than your old flat. I called on you several times there, after..."

"What? Say it! After you left me high and dry taking all my savings!"

"Listen now old thing. It wasn't like that...I had no choice...I...was being threatened for money. I panicked. Would you have me be harmed? I had no choice. I didn't mean to leave you."

"You panicked alright!" The tears started to flow down Jo's face.

"I find you in bed with some woman, in my flat, in my bed! You weren't even concerned with how you had hurt me. You were worried that dependable Jo, who got you out of every scrape and gave you all her money, would be gone. So you stole everything I had saved, that money was for my dream, to start my own business. You knew that! I loved you, and you destroyed me."

Roberta walked closer to Jo and touched her face. Jo pulled back sharply. "Don't touch me!"

\*\*\*\*\*

Billy took the steps up to Jo's flat two at a time. She had been watching the clock all day, just waiting till she could leave to pick her Jo. As Billy walked along the corridor she heard voices coming from Jo's flat. The door was slightly ajar so she held back and listened to a voice she didn't recognize.

"I know I hurt you chicken. I was in a difficult place then, you know that. I was exceptionally drunk that night; I'd been playing cards all day. You weren't going to be there when I went back to the flat. You know what your Bobbie is like when she drinks?"

"That's your excuse is it?"

Roberta took Jo's head in her hands tightly.

"It meant nothing chicken. Come back to me. No one has a love like ours. We are soul mates, you know that."

Jo felt panic taking hold. Her throat grew tight and her heart thudded. The way it always did when she tried to stand up to Roberta.

"G...go... I...have a dinner engagement tonight."

Roberta let go of Jo's head and laughed. "Ah yes. Cheeky chappy cockney boy Billy Boyd! Fancy a bit of rough did you my dear?"

"How do you know about Billy?"

"I heard you had been seen at the Alley Cat."

"Wait a minute! How did you know where to find me?"

Roberta didn't answer.

Jo felt the rage about to spill over. "You could have found out where I was anytime over the last two years. Its Billy isn't it? You heard I was seeing someone after two whole years on my own and you didn't like it. Your pride didn't like it. You were quite happy knowing I was alone all this time, but now someone wants me, you want me back!"

"Now Chicken..."

"Get out now!"

Billy heard enough and pushed her way through the door. "You heard her. Go."

Roberta swung round to stare at Billy. "Ah here she is right on cue. My stand in, I think my lady has had enough of trawling in the gutter with you, so why don't you be a good boy and crawl back to where you came from."

Billy was about to launch herself at Roberta when Jo said. "Billy stop. Please. Roberta, leave now. I'm not interested."

"She's not good enough for you Josephine. Is that what you really want? Some little oik from the east end?"

*Who is this upper class twit?* Thought Billy angrily.

"Jo Jo let me..."

Jo put her hand up to stop Billy from taking any action, and taking a deep breath said. "Need I remind you Bobbie that I am from the east end?"

"Yes, but you raised yourself out of the gutter, you have gained an education and now you are a special girl."

After repeatedly being held back by Jo, Billy's temper finally snapped.

She went nose to nose with Roberta and said. "Right that's enough you toffee nosed prick! Get out now or I'll throw you out on your bony arse!"

"I'm going." turning to Jo she said.

"You know what's right my darling. This ruffian knows nothing about our love, and our life. Do you think she's not going to break your heart? I've heard about her reputation. At least you know me. I won't hurt you again. When you've made up your mind, you can find me most nights at the Alley Cat. See you soon Chicken."

Once she was gone Billy turned to look at Jo. She looked like a little lost girl.

Billy walked over and took Jo in her arms. The tears then flooded out.

"Sh! It's alright princess. I'm here now. I won't let anyone upset you again."

\*\*\*\*\*

After a while, Billy got Jo calmed down a bit, and got her a drink. Billy sat in front of her and held her hand tightly.

"She's the one isn't she? The one that hurt you?"

Jo simply nodded.

"I don't want you to worry about her again. I'll be there for you."

"I'm...sorry Billy." Jo's mind told her what she should say, but it was breaking her up inside.

Billy leaned over and stroked Jo's cheek tenderly. "You don't have to be sorry Princess."

"I... do. I can't do this. I thought I could. I really wanted to, but..."

Billy gulped hard. "What? What can't you do Jo Jo?"

Fresh tears tumbled helplessly from Jo's eyes, as she held Billy's hand to her face. "This. Us."

"Us? Why? What do I do?"

"Nothing. You did nothing."

The jealousy that had been bubbling away, forced its way to the surface. Billy pulled Jo's hand away and stood.

"You want her back don't you? You never wanted to give me a chance."

"No! I never ever want to be with her again. Just seeing her again has reminded me how much she tormented my mind, my life. I can't do it again. If you hurt me, it would kill me."

Billy felt the tears coming to her eyes. She didn't want Jo to see her that way, so she turned her back and walked to the door. Without looking back she said, "I would have cherished you princess."

When Billy had walked out the door, Jo replied sadly. "I know cheeky chops."

\*\*\*\*\*

After attending to arrangements for their stay and this evening, Lord Dalton stood at the fireplace, enjoying a drink and cigarette in the drawing room, waiting for her young wife to join her. Alex had given the servants the night off and ordered dinner to be served in the suites dining room. She smiled and her heart beat faster as she thought of the evening ahead.

*My little bit all too myself!* Alex thought as she took a deep puff of smoke.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beth looked at her reflection again. Standing in only her black silk lingerie, stockings, high heel and her diamond Jewellery.

*Can I do this? I feel a little exposed. I suppose that's the point.* Thought Beth. She could already feel the excitement building deep inside at the thought of what her lord had planned. Alex had sent her a note earlier, explaining that she would be dismissing the servants for the evening and had ordered dinner to be delivered the suite. Beth was to attend her at seven o'clock wearing only her

lingerie and Jewellery. At first Beth thought to protest, but soon realised this was part of what she had asked Alex to teach her, and she knew that she would enjoy every second.

One last spray of perfume and Beth was ready to meet her lord. She opened the bedroom door a crack and saw Alex standing at the fireplace in the drawing room, facing away from Beth.

She took a deep breath and entered the drawing room area of the suite. Alex heard the door and turned slowly.

"You desired my presence my lord?"

She saw her partners eyes rake up and down her body. Alex had a dark feral look on her face, the deeply passionate look that Beth loved. She heard Alex emit a low growl and say, "Good evening my lady. Come here!"

When Beth reached Alex, she reached out to touch her beloved, only for Alex to grasp her hand tightly.

Alex twirled Beth around, so she was melded to her wife's back, Beth's hand now held securely behind her.

Beth heard Alex inhale her perfume as she lightly traced lips up to her wife's ear and whispered,

"You are not allowed to touch unless I give you permission. Do you understand?"

Beth hesitated a moment, slightly unsure of herself. Alex pulled Beth's arm tighter behind her back.

"Do you understand? Answer me when I ask you a question!"

The commanding tone of voice made Beth melt inside. "Yes my lord!"

"Good. If you want to stop at any time, I will only stop for the word Skylla, and remember, it's all about love. Tell me you understand?"

"I understand my lord."

"Good girl." Alex ran her free hand down front of Beth's corset, teasing her fingers lightly over her cleavage.



"I like this very much. You have pleased me. Do you remember the first time you wore something like this for me?"

The feel of Alex's breath in Beth's ear was making goose bumps appear down the flesh of her arm and leg.

"Hmm. Yes my lord, after my birthday at the Alley Cat."

"That's right. You teased your lord very badly that night. Didn't you?"

"Yes my lord, but I only wan..."

Alex grabbed Beth's hair with free hand and pulled her head back sharply, exposing more of her neck for her lords enjoyment.

"I don't want explanations. Only answer questions I ask! Yes, you acted like a very bad girl that night didn't you?"

"Oh yes my lord. Bad..." Beth moaned.

"You got above yourself, teasing and tantalizing me because you knew I would not touch you. You knew you were safe, because I promised to leave you untouched until after our wedding. You knew I would not break my word of honour. Well your mine now, Wife." Alex sucked and bit Beth's neck marking her as her own.

"Your mine aren't you wife? Tell me?"

"Yes! Yes! I'm yours."

Alex forced Beth to look at the other side of the room. "Maybe a bad girl like you should just be bent over my writing desk and fucked? Hmm?" Alex thrust her hips into her wife's backside, allowing her to feel the hardness that was waiting for her.

Beth's closed her eyes as she felt herself flooding with wetness.

"Oh god yes! Yes my lord!"

"Not yet." Alex whispered. She released Beth and turned round.

"Kiss me please my lord." Beth moaned.

Alex smiled darkly, knowing she had her wife right where she wanted her. Alex was extremely pleased as to how her wife was responding.

*Oh yes, little bit. I'm going to enjoy you immensely tonight.*

"You don't make demands on me. I don't think you have earned one of my kisses yet my lady. Perhaps later when you have proved you can behave to my satisfaction, but for now we shall eat."

"Hold out your wrists."

Beth looked on in surprise, as she observed Alex reach out to a side table, and lift what looked like a pair of leather cuffs attached together by a silver chain.

Beth's heart started to race as saw Alex open one of the cuffs, ready for her wrist to enter.

"I don't..."

"Sh..." Alex saw the uncertainty in her Beth's eyes. Whereas with Alex's past bed mates had been solely about power, dominance and both parties pleasure, this was different. This was someone she loved more than anyone in the world, and she wanted to guide her wife through this with as much tenderness and love as she could.

Alex kissed both of Beth's wrists, slowing and tenderly. "You are so beautiful my love. I seek only your pleasure. Do not think you have to do this for me."

As Beth watched her lord reverently bestow such love and care on her, all of her doubts vanished.

Alex lifted one of her wife's wrists and placed it in one cuff. Without securely closing it, Alex looked into Beth's eyes and asked. "What do you wish? Do you wish to say the word?"

"No my lord. I wish you to bring me pleasure." Beth whispered.

Alex closed her eyes and let out an almost orgasmic moan. This was the most blissful part to Alex, when her partner willingly gives up their power to her.

When Alex opened her eyes, the steely, commanding edge had returned to her face. She quickly secured both restraints and pulled Beth along by the connecting chain, towards the dining room.

"Now let's see how good or bad you really are little bit."

\*\*\*\*\*

Billy couldn't bear the thought of going home, so she found herself walking towards the Alley Cat Club.

She was let in as usual by Jack the doorman. "How's tricks Billy?"

"I need a triple whiskey!" said Billy moodily.

"That bad eh?"

"Something like that." Billy muttered as she entered the club and walked towards the bar.

Billy took out a cigarette and ordered a drink from the barman.

"A pint and a double whiskey chaser."

When the drinks arrived, she gulped the whiskey down in one then ordered another straight away. When she repeated this the second time the barman said, "Are you sure Billy? Why don't you give the beer a try first?"

"Listen pal, I've paid my money, now give me the drinks!"

"Alright alright! Calm down mate!"

Then next chaser she did sip though, as the liquid was giving her the warm dull feeling she so desperately wanted.

*The one girl I've ever fallen for and she doesn't want me. That's just your luck Billy boy? You should have just stayed with what you're used to. Servicing lonely women! That's all your good for. No one will ever want you.* Billy downed the rest of her drinks and knocked on the bar for more.

"Same again." the barman just sighed and went to pour the drinks.

"Well well! Drowning our sorrows are we?"

Billy turned round to see Roberta Whitworth sitting next her at the bar.

"You!" Billy growled.

Roberta placed a cigarette into a long silver holder and lit it. After she took a long drag she said,

"Kicked you out did she Billy boy? I told you she was too good for you."

Billy's hand started to shake, she was so angry. The barman feeling the tension at the bar, tried to distract Roberta. "What can I get you guv'nor?"

"Bottle of champagne barman, I'm celebrating." Roberta said smugly.

Billy knew if she stayed at the bar any longer, she was likely to do something that would get her thrown out. She gathered up her drinks and went to move to one of the small tables on the other side of the room.

"My darling Josephine sling you out into the gutter where you belong old chum?" Roberta sniggered into her glass.

Billy took a deep breath turned to face her rival, and said in a rather sarcastic tone, "Listen me old mucker, if you want to keep that face of yours in one piece, I'd shut my trap or I'll make sure even your dear old mummy wouldn't recognise you!"

"Ooh threats of violence? Lovely to see your common east end blood coming out in full force. How did you ever think you could get a girl like Josephine? She's made for better things. Stick to the common little scrubbers you are used to!"

Billy jumped off her stool and grabbed Roberta by the lapels. "Me not good enough for her? I don't know all the details but I do know that you are the one that broke her heart! You shattered her trust in everything and everyone. She's is never going to be happy and love again because of you, you dried up old trout!"

"No, she won't love again, because she's mine and always will be. I'm in here you see." Roberta pointed to her head.

"And I'm never leaving. You of all people should know how to manipulate a woman. I could do anything, and I will always get her back because she is under the thumb. I made sure of that when I first met her. She can't say no to me. I guarantee, I'll be back fucking her within a week!"

That was the last straw for Billy. She punched Roberta in the stomach, and as she was bent double gasping, aim a blow directly at her nose.

Roberta collapsed to the floor and grasping at her face.

"Stop! Stop! Jack! I need some help over here!" shouted the barman.

"Don't ever speak that way about Jo again you fucking prick!"

Roberta looked up at Billy and through the blood that was streaming down her face, smirked and said,

"Thank you Boyd. You've given me exactly what I wanted. I will go to Josephine with my bloodied face and my story of a vicious attack by you. She will see the real you. Violent, common scum!"

"Billy roared in frustration and just as Billy pulled back her arm to deliver the final blow to Roberta, when she was pulled back by Jack and Poni, who had entered the club minutes earlier to witness the altercation.

It took both of them to try and subdue Billy. "Get her out of here Des!" Shouted Jack to the barman.

"I'm fine! I'm calm now! Let me go." pleaded Billy.

Des helped a puffing and panting Roberta to her feet. "You'll regret this Boyd!"

"Poni I'm fine let me go okay?" Billy said trying to ignore Roberta.

"Alright, let's get you seated and calmed down old man." said Poni.

As Jack and Poni lifted the upturned table beside them, Billy heard Roberta call her name from behind. She turned as the stricken Roberta hit her as hard as she could with a bar stool.

Billy was sent crashing to the floor. Jack and Des grabbed aristocrat and dragged her towards the door, while Poni tended to her friend.

"Are you alright Billy?" Blood streamed from Billy's nose. She spat some blood from her mouth onto the floor.

"I'll be okay. Ugh! She caught me with my back turned, but a five year old could have swung that stool harder. Here. Help me up mate."

"Of course." Poni helped pull her up and brush down her clothes.

"Imagine hitting you from behind! That just isn't cricket!"

"Yeah well, you expect nothing less like from a pansy like her."

Jack came back to check on them. "Is there somewhere we can get her cleaned up Jack?"

"Yes guv, I'll take you to the back office, and I'll get you some ice."

"C'mon young fella me lad. Let's get you cleaned up and you can tell me all about it."

\*\*\*\*\*

Jack showed them to the Alley Cats back office. "Thanks Jack. I'll take it from here. Can you make sure Roberta is ejected from the premises before we come back out?"

"Of course, Ms Woodward. I'll leave this ice bucket here for you."

Poni got some ice and wrapped it up in a bar towel. "Billy sit down will you, and put this on your face. You're going to be black and blue come the morning."

"Argh!" Billy sat on the desk and moaned in pain as raised the bar towel to her face. Poni poured them both a drink from the decanter took a seat in front of her.

"So. Tell me what happened? Are you drunk?"

Billy laughed softly. "Just a bit, I needed it. What are you doing here anyway? You're not usually out on the town or down the boozers without your good lady?"

"I'm at a bit of a loose end. It's Lotty's charity committee meeting tonight. I usually have a drink and a game of snooker with Alex. I thought I'd toddle down and see if I could pick up a game of cards. Stop changing the subject. What happened?" asked Poni more firmly.

Billy sighed. "Well, Jo Jo and I have been getting on really well. It was meant to be our second night out tonight."

"That's wonderful. We all hoped you would both come to your senses before we had to knock your heads together! In fact Lotty and I were hoping you two would come for dinner on Saturday."

"Yeah, I really thought I was getting somewhere. Getting Jo to see the real me and to trust me."

"So what went wrong?"

"Ahh. I turned up to take her out for the night. The door to her flat was open, and I could hear her arguing. Turns out it was her previous lover."

Poni looked surprised. "Whitworth? Roberta Whitworth?"

"Yeah, you know her?"

"Roberta Whitworth is well known in society circles. She's a little too fond of cards and is heavily in debt to money lenders. Her father, Lord Somerset cut her off after a few years ago after she ran up one debt too many. I don't think she would be a very good catch at all."

"Well from what I heard, the relationship wasn't the best. Jo finds it hard to trust. She would never tell me why, but Roberta must be the one that caused it. I could hear Jo shouting at her to get out; Roberta seemed to be trying every trick in the book to talk her round."

"Was she threatening?"

"I'm not sure what happened in the past but I broke it up before it got too far. After I got rid of her, Jo didn't want to know. Said she couldn't take the chance on a relationship again. I... I left."

"And you bumped into her here?"

"Yeah she came in to taunt me I think. She bleated that she could do anything to Jo, and she would always take her back and said some low things about Jo. I had to smack her in the mouth Pony. She deserved it, but you heard her. That's exactly what she wanted. Now she's going to go back to Jo and show her what a thug I am. She a manipulative bitch!" Billy downed the last of her drink.

"And you're just going to give up?"

Billy through her hands up. "What I'm I supposed to do? She doesn't trust me. She doesn't want me!"

Poni got up and placed a comforting hand on Billy's shoulder. "Come on now young fella. Where is your gumption? You need to get over there and make her understand you will stand up for her and never let her down!"

"Bur Roberta will show her the busted up face I gave her."

"Just tell her what happened."

"What if she doesn't believe me?"

"Is she the one? Do you love her?"

Billy let out a long breath. "Yeah, she the one, I love her so much Poni."

"Then fight for her! Make her understand. Jo might not admit it, but she loves you too. You should see the way she looks at you."

Billy smiled. "Really? You think so?"

Poni pulled Billy onto her feet and said. "Fair heart never won fair lady. Now be a good chap and go and talk to her. Jo needs you."

*Maybe I can convince her? Yes...Josephine Stafford, I'm not letting you go that easily!*

"Wish me luck Poni."

Poni shook hands with Billy and said. "The best of British to you young fella, and tell Jo Lotty will expect you both for dinner on Saturday."

"I will and thank you Poni." Billy said as she left.

*Hmm. I think I'll skip the cards and see if my own fair lady is home. Perhaps I can persuade her that an early night is in order!* Poni chuckled to herself.

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Beth was led through to the dining room. Several platters were laid out waiting for them.

Alex took off her dinner jacket and sat at the head of the table, leaving Beth standing unsure of what to do next.

*Should I sit without permission or wait?* Beth wondered.

Alex waited a minute just keep Beth on her toes and then indicated towards her lap. "Sit here."

Beth rushed over and placed herself in her loves lap.

"Good girl. Would you like something to eat little bit?" Beth nodded.

Alex lifted a canapé and held it to Beth's lips. "Open. Now bite. Is that good Beth?"

The young blonde hummed with delight and nodded.

Alex had ordered a meal of finger foods just for this purpose

"Remember only I can give you what you want, what you need."

"Hmm. Yes my lord."

Slowly and tenderly Alex fed Beth a whole plate of food. With each bite she gave her, she would let her fingers linger around Beth's lips.

"Lick. Lick them clean!"

Beth licked and sucked Alex's fingers, while her lord teased her nipples thorough the lace that encased them.

"Hmm." Beth moaned. She was nearly driven to distraction with arousal. The teasing and playing all through their meal had driven wild.

Although bound and shackled at the wrist. The young woman had never felt such a feeling of love and being taken care of.

Alex pulled her fingers from their warm haven in Beth's mouth, while the other hand stroked its way up her wife's thighs, and said. "I think my girl had quite enough."

Beth's eyes rolled back in her head at the feelings Alex's stroking was causing.

The older woman was delighted at the way her wife was responding to this new kind of play. She remembered something that Beth had mentioned to her on more than one occasion, and decided to give Beth exactly what she wanted.

The very thought of what she was about to do made a shiver run down her spine. *Time to step this up a notch or two my little bit!*

Beth's eyes sprang open as Alex's soft stroking turned to a sharp smack.

"Oh! Another please?" Beth could help but grasp her breast in a desperate search for relief.

Alex grasped Beth's chin tightly. "Did I allow you to touch yourself?"

*Oh no!*



I'm sorry my lord! I...I forgot! I'm so sorry!" Beth said terrified at the thought of Alex stopping the game.

"You will be sorry, and you will pay for disregarding my commands. Go and wait for me at my desk! On your knees."

Beth heart sped up and she smiled inwardly. *Is Alex going to give my fantasy?*

After Beth left the room, Alex finished the rest of her drink slowly, wanting to give her wife time to contemplate what was ahead for her.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beth felt like she had been kneeling, waiting for hours before she finally heard the dining room door opened, and Alex stride towards the desk. She completely ignored Beth on the floor and sat in the large leather chair.

Beth watched with anticipation as her partner took a cigar from the box on the table lit. Not until Alex had blown out her first big puff of smoke, did she turn her blue steely eyes upon Beth in front of her.

"Now. How do I deal with my wife's blatant disregard for my commands?"

The young woman thought this was a rhetorical question and wise to keep quiet this time. Beth felt the throbbing between her legs intensify. Alex had such a natural aura of command that she did not need to shout, all she needed was dark timbre of her voice and those eyes.

"Hmm. Stand and strip for me."

Beth jumped to her feet quickly. *Maybe if I can show how good I' am, she will touch me.*

As the corset hooked at the front, she was able to mange to take it off while cuffed. Her breasts tumbled out, and then she turned and slid her knickers off slowly, in order to give Alex then best view.

When she went to take off her suspenders, Alex said firmly. "Leave them."

Beth turned back round. It felt strangely thrilling to be standing before her partner in only her suspenders.

Alex hungrily devoured Beth's body with her eyes and noting the hardness of her wife's nipples, and the wetness evident between her legs said,

"You love this don't you?"

Beth nodded.

Alex could tell Beth was aching for her touch, longing for relief. "What do you want?"

She hesitated, wondering if her answer would get her into more trouble.

"Answer me when I ask you a question!"

"I want you to touch me my lord!"

"Oh? I don't think you've been good enough for my touch Lady Beth."

Alex pretended to consider her options, then went into her desk drawer and pulled out a paddle she had placed there earlier.

"Do you want this?" Alex smacked the paddle against her hand, letting Beth hear the thwacking noise.

"Oh yes!" Beth croaked.

"I think you're to have to make me want to give you this." Play with your breasts."

Beth was delighted to be allowed to touch herself. She couldn't believe how her body was on fire, when her partner hadn't even touched her yet.

"Pinch your nipples. Harder!"

Beth hissed at the pleasure/pain sensation.

As Alex watched Beth moan and play with her breasts, her hand unconsciously went to squeeze her large appendage at her fly.

*Oh god! I want her so badly. I need some relief if I'm going to keep this up!*

In the past, Alex would have been able to go on for hours, teasing and tantalising her partner for the evening. But with Beth it was different. Everything with Beth was different. She needed her so badly, and was in no doubt of who was really in control in their relationship.

Alex walked round to stand behind Beth and let her hands take her wife's place on her breasts.

"Oh yes my lord. Please!" Beth moaned as she felt her lord's teeth bite down on her neck.

"Please what? Tell me what you want?" She breathed in Beth's ear.

"The paddle? I want to feel."

"Bend over the desk." Beth complied, all the time breathing hard in anticipation.

Alex bent over and whispered. "Remember this is me loving you, and you'll thank me for what I give you."

Beth nodded and didn't realise her partner had pulled away before she felt the first smack. She cried in surprise. It stung but made her sex contract in want.

"What do you say?"

Beth was at first confused then remembered.

"Thank you my lord!"

"Do you want more?"

"Oh yes please."

"You'll have to do better than that! Beg for it!"

"I beg you my lord! Give me more please?"

Alex was in utter bliss. Her wife spread out in front of her, the copious wetness dripping slowly down the inside of her thighs, begging her for more.

Alex gave her two more in quick succession. *Smack smack!* "Oh yes! Thank you my lord!"

"Only bad girls like this, you must be a really bad girl, are you?"

Beth was literally shaking with need. "Yes! Yes! I'm a bad girl!"

*Smack!* "Who are you a bad girl for? Who?"

"You my lord! Only ever you!" Beth's fingers were turning white, as she was hanging onto the other side of the desk so hard.

*Smack!* Alex lay over Beth's back and pulled her hair, raising her torso up. "That's right me. I am your lord."

Alex had never been so turned on or as desperate as she was with Beth.

She ran her fingers through the wetness of Beth's sex and pushed her bulge into it. "You want this don't you?"

"Yes. There is nothing I want more."

Alex kissed her wife deeply. Beth was delighted at finally feeling her partner's soft lips. Before Beth enjoyed the kiss too much, the older woman stood back from the desk.

Beth turned, as best she could, to see Alex undoing her belt achingly slowly.

Looking her wife straight in the eye, Alex said. "You know what I want to hear."

*Oh God! I don't think I can take much more!*

"Fuck me my lord. Fuck me with your cock!"

"Oh yes!" Alex held onto Beth's hip while she placed the tip of her cock at her wife's entrance. Holding it there, allowing the tease to continue.

Beth couldn't take anymore, and was sure she her quivering sex might explode before Alex could do anything.

"Oh please my lord! I can't take it anymore. I just need you so much. Just you, come inside me now!"

"As you wish." Alex thrust in deeply in one movement, filling her wife up.

"Oh fuck!" The feeling of thrusting inside her wife was something she had no words for. It was beyond anything her dreams could ever have imagined.

Restraint suddenly left her. Alex held onto Beth's hips and thrust fast and hard.

"Oh god....I need you all the time..."

"Yes my lord...harder! Make me come around your cock!"

All the teasing and frustration made Beth's sex tumble unstoppably over the edge.

Her partner fared no better. Alex hunched over Beth's back as her hips jerked, sending the heat of her orgasm into her wife.

They both lay gasping trying to regain their senses. Beth felt the older woman's lips kissing her neck.

"I love you little bit. I love you so much. Thank you for giving me that."

*She's thanking me?*

You don't need to thank me my lord. I love this with you. You've opened up a new world to me."

Alex pulled out gingerly, carefully and not wanting to hurt her wife. She helped Beth up and released the cuffs from her wrists, kissing each one after they were freed.

Beth touched her hand to Alex's face. "That was wonderful darling."

Beth was surprised to see tears welling in Alex's eyes.

"What's wrong?"

"I just...I can't believe how lucky I' am. How my life could be work out so perfectly. I would die for you."

Beth went into her partners arms. "We were both lucky. I love you."

Alex kissed her head and breathed in the scent of her wife's hair. "Come to bed with me little bit. I want to hold you tight all night."

"Yes, that would be heavenly."

Alex led Beth by the hand towards their bedroom.

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Jo had lost track of the time. She had lain crying on her bed for what seemed like hours, her thoughts tormenting her.

*How can Roberta control my mind and fears so much? I wanted to give Billy a chance. I feel so much when I'm with her. I want...*

*No! She'll hurt you! Don't you remember how much Roberta hurt you? Billy is like that. Billy jumps from one bed to another. You'll always wonder where she is and what's she's doing.*

*At least you know where you are with Roberta.*

Jo's thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. She looked at the clock. "Who can that be? It's past midnight."

She wiped her puffy red eyes and walked towards the door. Uneasy at opening the door at this hour, she shouted, "Who's there?"

"It's Billy Jo Jo. Can I talk to you?"

Jo's heart sped up at the sound of Billy's voice. She tentatively unlocked the door and opened it slightly. When she saw Billy's bruised and bloodied face she gasped and pulled Billy through the door.

"What happened?"

"I had a disagreement with a bar stool."

"You've been fighting?"

Billy smiled sheepishly. "Well yeah a bit, it was in a good cause Jo Jo. Honest."

Jo sighed and said. "Come and I'll put something on your cuts and you can tell me all about it."

While Jo got something for the cuts, Billy wandered over to the record player. "Could I put something on? Music makes me feel better."

"If you like."

*Great! Now to create the right atmosphere. What have we got here? Hmm... You sure do like the 20's Princess.* Billy thought as she flipped through the small record collection.

*Ah! Now that's exactly the type of thing I'm looking for!*

Jo looked from the kitchen area, as she heard the strains of 'Someone to watch over me' fill the room. Her breath caught when her eyes met Billy's across the room.

*Oh god cheeky chops. You melt my heart! No! Be strong Josephine. You can't let this happen to you again!*

The designer shook herself. "Sit there." She pointed at the settee and sat in front on the coffee table.

Jo put some alcohol on a piece of cotton wool. "This might sting a bit."

"It's alright princess."

Trying to ignore the endearment Jo said. "So tell me what happened?"

As Billy began to relay the story, Jo exclaimed. "Roberta? Roberta did this? She can't have!"

"Do you think I'd lie to you?" Billy snapped angrily.

"No. It's not that. It's just Roberta would never fight, because she's a coward. We were robbed once coming home from a party; she just ran away and left me. She is a coward." Jo said sadly.

"Well she didn't suddenly find a dose of courage. Poni and Jack had pulled me off her and calmed me down. We were walking away when she called my name, I turned my head and she hit me from behind with the stool."

"That sounds like her. So what did she say to make you hit her in the first place?" Jo continued to dab around Billy's face.

"Eh...I wouldn't like to repeat it Jo Jo."

"Tell me Billy, please?"

"Uh the gist of it was that, she had you under the thumb and would have you back in her bed within a week."

Jo's already puffy eyes began to water up again. "I'll wager she didn't put it as nicely as that."

"The truth is no, she didn't, and that's why I had to give her a smack. I'm sorry princess."

"Don't be. She deserved it, but I'm sorry you had to get hurt in for it." Jo's thumb unconsciously stroked Billy's bruised lips.

Billy captured the hand against her mouth and kissed it softly.

"Please don't. When you touch me..."

"Then let me." Billy sucked one of Jo's fingers into her mouth. Jo's resistance wavered for second before she pulled away.

"No I can't do this." Jo stood and walked over to the window.

Billy's hand dropped in defeat. "Why? Tell me what she did to you."

"She was my first love and I thought that I was so incredibly lucky to have her."

"Huh? Lucky to have her? She's a cad!" exclaimed Billy.

"I know, but at the beginning she showered me with gifts and affection. Her Father, Lord Somerset, hadn't cut her off financially yet. As our relationship progressed I realised I was becoming more and more dependent on her. I couldn't imagine my life going on without her.

She cultivated my dependency, I know realise. She would flirt with other women in front of me, tell me about girls who wanted her and propositioned her. She was playing games, telling me I was lucky to have her and how I would never get anyone as good as her. I was becoming desperate to hold onto Roberta and she knew she could get off with a great deal. I knew she had been unfaithful along the way, but she always talked me round. When I look back now, it seems like I was in some sort of trance. I think, how could I have let her away with that? But every time I thought I'd had enough she would say things, manipulated me in such a way that I would end up begging her to stay with me."

The tears ran down Jo's face, as the memories flashed through her mind. Billy couldn't sit any longer, and walked over the window, wrapping her arms around Jo from behind.

"I'm here princess. Tell me."

"About a year into our into our relationship, her father had enough of her spiralling gambling debts, and cut her off. She had always borrowed money off me, but it became worse after that. The last straw came when these two thugs came to my work. Roberta had promised them I would pay them. I was so scared Billy. I got home as fast as I could, to confront Roberta. I..."

Billy squeezed tighter. "I've got you. Just get it all out."

"I found her in our bed with another woman. I felt like my chest would explode. Everything happened so fast. She tried to get the woman out and keep me from leaving, but I wriggled free and just ran. I didn't know where I was going, I just ran and ran. Sometime later I ended up at near where I grew up. I looked around, seeing where I'd come from, realising the strength it had taken to get out from such a poor, deprived area and make something of myself. Somehow the scales fell from my eyes and I saw how far I had fallen from the girl that left there for art school.

I came home that night ready to ask Roberta to leave, but she had gone, and taken all my savings with her."

Billy turned Jo round and held her by the shoulders. "She would do that? What a nasty piece of work. I should have broken her arms for her! Was it much?"

"All my savings, I had been saving all the way through Art College and when I started work at Hartnell's. I'd been saving for my dream, to start my own couture house. She knew how much my dream meant to me."

"Did she come back?"

"Yes. I didn't let her through the front door though. I moved soon after that and didn't see her again till tonight."

Billy took Jo's face in her hands. "I understand what you went through now, and why seeing her again tonight scared you off, but I won't you know, I'm going to fight for you princess. You are the one I want."

"Billy please, I can't risk being hurt again. Do you know what that did to me? I was nearly dismissed from my work. I could barely bring myself to leave the house. My confidence was destroyed and I vowed that I would never share my life with anyone again. I've managed to get some parts of my life back, and make some friends. That has to be enough."

"Tell me what your heart says?"

"I can't listen to it."

In desperation Billy took Jo's hand and held it to her heart. "I'll tell you what mine says, and I want you feel it. Forget your fears and your worries, just feel."

Billy looked deep into Jo's eyes and said, "I love you Josephine Stafford. I have loved you since the first time you rolled your pretty eyes at me in the Alley Cat. I will treasure you. I will cherish you, I will protect you. I may sometimes annoy you and sometimes you may want flay me alive, but you will never being in any doubt that I would die before hurting you. Please trust in me, and believe in me. I will never be complete without you."

After that heartfelt plea, Jo could do nothing more but inch her way towards Billy's lips as she whispered.



"I love you..."

Their lips came softly together, Billy not wanting to scare her love away and Jo not wanting to hurt Billy's already tender lips.

Billy was in heaven as their tongues explored each gently, but thoroughly. They finally had to break apart breathlessly, their foreheads resting against each other.

"Tell me this is real. Tell me you'll be my girl Princess?"

"It's real. I don't think I can stay away from you any longer cheeky chops!"

Billy's face was wreathed in smiles as she lifted Jo and swung her round in her arms.

"Ow! Oh!"

"What is it my love?"

Billy held her to her battered face. "My face is hurts when I smile, but I don't care because that's all I want to do Princess."

When Billy leaned in again for a kiss, Jo stopped her. "Uh uh. Your sore and I have a headache from all that crying. How about we both have an aspirin and have a lie down. You must be so tired."

"I suppose I am, as long as I get to hold you."

"Always, cheeky chops." Jo kissed Billy on the nose and went to get the tablets.

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After taking the painkillers, the new couple fell asleep on Jo's bed. Jo had woken with her head on her partner's chest. She looked at the clock on her bedside table. *Four o'clock. Em...*

She looked down at the person who had stolen her heart. To Jo, Billy was not just handsome. She reminded her of a Grecian statue. Jo traced her finger over Billy's face. *Beautifully handsome.*

Billy's eyes flittered open. "Hmm. Hello princess."

"Morning my love."

Billy reached up and stroked Jo's soft cheek. "Do you know how good that feels to hear?"

Jo smiled. "As good as it feels to say it. I've never slept more soundly than I did last night."

"Well I'm happy to oblige. You're welcome to sleep on top on me anytime Princess."

The designer leant down and whispered "Thank you." before kissing Billy's lips.

They both moaned as the kiss deepened, both their passions bubbling away under the surface, fighting to get out.

"How does your face feel this morning?"

"Not too bad. I suppose you have work today? Can I see you after work? Since its Friday night? Oh and the Woodward's want us to have dinner with them tomorrow night as well. What do you say?"

"I say yes to both. I want to spend as much time with you as I can. I have to be at work at nine, but can I ask you one thing?"

"Anything, I would do, or give you anything you wanted princess."

"Make love to me. Please?"

Suddenly very awake, Billy flipped Jo onto her back. "Are you sure? I want you to trust me. This isn't about getting you into bed. I love you and I can wait till you're ready to give all of yourself."

"I...I'm ready. I trust you my love. I want to show you, give you everything." Jo whispered as she pulled down Billy's lips down to her own.

Encouraged by their deep passionate kiss, Billy untied Jo's silk dressing gown. "Take this off."

Billy helped Jo slip out of it leaving Jo only naked apart from her pants. The singer's breath stilled as she took in her girlfriends body. "You are beautiful."

Jo's nipples hardened under her partners gaze. "Touch me."

Billy trailed her fingers down Jo's body grazing her breast and hip causing a flood of wetness to pool in Jo's sex.

"I want to feel you too." gasped Jo.

Billy pulled off her white t shirt quickly and began struggling with her belt and jeans. Eventually, with help from her girlfriend she divested herself of them.

"Oh god. Jo Jo. You feel so good." Billy moaned as their bodies made first contact.

"Oh yes. More!" Jo exclaimed as the singer sucked and bit her neck.

Billy's bit and kissed her way down to Jo's breasts. "Oh, Billy! Yes!"

Jo watched her breast be loved in a way it had never been before, with love and tenderness. The lover's eyes met as Billy allowed her girlfriends nipple to slowly and sensually slide from her lips with a pop.

Before turning her attention to the other breast, Billy said. "I love you Jo Jo. I will never stop. I will never let you down."

"I love you too." Jo pushed her partners head down onto her breast, which ached for attention.

Billy's clit throbbed painfully. Her instincts were telling her to thrust and find much needed relief, but this wasn't about her pleasure. It was about showing Jo how much she was treasure and adored.

Billy trailed her kisses down to her girlfriend hip. She learned very quickly that Jo was very sensitive there, because of the moaning and squirming she was doing.

"Billy I need you. Please."

The singer gave a small bite to Jo's inner thigh before smiling up at her girlfriend.

"I'll give you anything you need."

Billy parted Jo's wet lips and couldn't resist giving her sex a long lick.

"Hmm. You taste wonderful Princess."

"Oh god Billy. Don't stop please!"

"Never." Billy trailed her tongue around a very wet opening and only briefly dipping in before moving upwards. She used the very tip of her tongue to tease and play with Jo's engorged clit.

Jo so desperately needed a harder contact and pushed Billy's head down.

"I want to feel you inside my love."

Feeling Jo's thighs begin to shake with need, Billy pushed first one then two fingers into Jo's opening and began a gentle thrust while lavishing attention on her engorged nub.

"Yes. Harder my love, harder!"

Billy obliged by thrusting deeper and harder. When she felt Jo's walls start to grasp onto her fingers, she sucked Jo's clit into her mouth.

"Yes! Billy, I love you! Love you!" Jo screamed and nearly pulled Billy's hair out as she came.

Jo lay gasping when Billy crawled up and took possession of her mouth.

"You taste so good Princess, but I want you again!" Billy growled.

No one had ever shown Jo such attention before, but she wanted to feel the full force of Billy's passion, so she said. "Together, my love."

Billy smiled, she was more than ready so she mounted Jo's thigh and thrust her fingers back inside her girlfriend. "Of course."

"Oh Jesus you make me feel so good." exclaimed Billy as she began to thrust herself harder.

Jo grasped onto Billy's buttocks pulling her in harder. "Fuck me Billy! Come on me!"

"Oh fuck Jo Jo I'm going to come."

"Yes! Yes!"

Billy ground her hips hard onto Jo and came hard.

The two sweaty bodies lay tangled together panting. "I...I love you Princess. You are never getting rid of me."

Jo pulled Billy into her arms tightly. "Never, I love you cheeky chops."

They drifted off to sleep secure in the knowledge, they at last, had found their souls other half.

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The Daltons sat at the breakfast table in their sumptuous suite. Thomas and Laura busied themselves with the breakfast platters and serving tea.

"I think we can manage from here Laura. I'll call if we need you." Beth said to Laura.

"Yes m'lady."

After they exited the dining room, Alex looked over the top of her newspaper, watching Beth squirm in her seat, and smirked.

Beth caught her red handed. "Something amusing you my lord?"

Alex folded up her newspaper and lifted her coffee. "Nothing at all my lady."

"You, my lord Dalton look a little too smug for your own good."

"Smug? Me? Well perhaps I have a lot to be smug about? I have the most beautiful wife in the world and the most satisfying marriage." Alex arched her eyebrow, gently teasing Beth.

Beth took Alex's big hand in her own and smiled. "Perhaps you do."

Alex reached over and stroked her wife's cheek. "Seriously, are you alright this morning? Sore?"

"Pleasantly so my lord. So what's first on the list of our sightseeing day?" Beth asked as she made up a breakfast plate for Alex.

"I thought we could start with the Empire State Building, and then have lunch at the Russian tea rooms. After that, well I have a surprise in mind. I'll tell you at lunch."

Beth handed Alex her breakfast. "Ooh I'm intrigued!"

"I hope I can always keep your life exciting little bit." Alex said digging into her breakfast.

"I'm sure you will my lord!"

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Billy became aware of two things as she slipped into consciousness. Her mouth was as dry as the Gobi desert, and she felt the reassuring weight of her new love lying virtually on top of her. She opened her eyes and glanced towards the clock. *Eight o'clock. I wonder what time Jo has to be at work.*

Billy stroked her hand down Jo's back and gently kissed her head.

"Jo Jo what time do you have to go to work?"

"Hmm? Sleep. Tired..."

"Princess? Don't you have work?"

Jo's eyes snapped open. "What time is it?"

Jo gasped. "Oh no! I start at nine! I'll never make it!"

Billy grabbed Jo as she struggled to get up. "Calm down. I'll get you there okay. I have the motor parked outside."

"Really?"

"Yes really, but first I want my good morning kiss princess."

Jo smiled and then leaned over to thoroughly kiss Billy. "Hmm. now that was nice. I love you." Billy said after their lips parted.

"Yes." Jo suddenly felt a little unsure of herself. "I know last night you said..." Billy silenced her with a finger.

"Last night was the best night of my life. I love you with all of my heart, and I will go to bed and wake up with you for as long as you want me." Billy knew that Jo would need constant reassurance for the time being, until she felt more secure."

Jo kissed her love and said. "Thank you for saying that, and thank you for knowing what I needed to hear."

"I'll always know. Now princess, you better get up. You have dresses to design. Billy pinched Jo's bare buttock.

"Aw! Listen cheeky chops you don't want to make me angry!" Jo sat up and put on her dressing gown.

Billy put her best cocky look on her face. "Oh? I'd like to see that princess!"

"I'm sure. Help yourself to anything while I get ready."

As Jo reached the bathroom, there was a knock at the door. "Can you get that while I get washed love?"

"Will do" Billy quickly pulled on her jeans and t shirt. The knocking continued relentlessly.

"Alright! Keep your hair on!"

Billy opened the door to find a very battered and bruised Roberta Whitworth, Flowers and chocolates in hand.

"You! You ruffian! What are you doing here at this time in the morning?"

"Well I just got out of Jo Jo's bed. That's what I'm doing here. You're little plan didn't work out did it Whitworth?"

Roberta looked disgusted and tried to peer over Billy's Shoulder. "Where is Josephine? I want to see her myself."

Billy quietly stepped into the corridor and closed the door quietly behind her. She looked side to side, before suddenly grabbing Roberta, pushing her against the wall with her arm up her back. The flowers and chocolates went crashing to the ground.

"What are you doing you fiend!"

"Listen closely Whitworth. I am with Jo now. She is mine, not yours. She's mine because we love each other and we give that love to each other willingly. I don't want to see you anywhere near my girl again. If I do Whitworth, you won't get back off the floor next time!"

Billy threw her to the floor. "Now sling your hook!"

Roberta scrambled to her feet and hurried down the corridor. "You'll regret this Boyd!"

Billy smiled, and let herself back into the flat just as Jo was coming out the bathroom, putting on her earrings.

"Who was it love?"

"Em..." Billy stuffed her hands into her pockets nervously. *I suppose I should be honest.*

"It was Whitworth."

Jo gasped. "R...Roberta? What did she want?"

"To tell you how I attacked her last night no doubt. I didn't stop to ask. She came baring flowers and chocolates. I...uh...got rid of her and made her understand it wouldn't be wise to come back."

The singer wasn't sure what Jo's reaction would be until she found her arms full with the fashion designer.

"Thank you. I'm so glad you were here and I didn't have to face her on my own."

Billy took Jo's face in her hands. "You will never be alone again. I love you princess." After a simple kiss, she added.

"Now let's get you to work!"

\*\*\*\*\*

That evening Beth sat at her dressing table, Laura putting the finishing touches to her hair. It had been a magical day. Spending anytime with Alex was wonderful, but here on honeymoon, without Alex having the worries and stress of the foundation was extra special. She was as relaxed as Beth had ever seen her.

As her partner had promised they had spent the morning sightseeing. The view from the top of the Empire State building had been truly breath-taking.

True to her word, after a scrumptious lunch at the Russian tea room, Alex had indeed given her a surprise. She had taken her to Tiffany & Co to pick a new piece of Jewellery to add to her collection.

Although Beth tried to insist she had more than enough pieces of jewellery, Alex had been quite firm about it, and said she would explain why later that evening.

*Alex always has to have an air of mystery!* Beth chuckled to herself.

"That's you all done m'lady. Are you sure you don't want me to put on your new necklace for you?"

"No thank you Laura, Lord Dalton wanted to do that for me tonight. So where are you and Thomas off to this evening?"

"We're going to see a show on Broadway m'lady! I never dreamed I could do such a thing." Laura said excitedly.

"Wonderful. Thomas treating you well?"

Laura looked down and blushed. "Yes, he asked me if we could start stepping out together. You know official like?"

"He is a lovely young man. I'm happy for you Laura."

"Will that be all m'lady?"

"Yes, thank you Laura. Could you ask Lord Dalton to join me?"

"Of course. Have a good evening."

A few minutes later Alex knocked and entered their bedroom. Beth stood and smiled as Alex kissed her hand.

"You look exquisite sweetheart." Beth looked down nervously at her pale blue evening gown.

"I hoped you would like it, but I wasn't sure."

"You my wife ooze style whatever you wear." Alex lifted the Tiffany box from Beth's dressing table.

"You will look especially stunning wearing this." Beth watched as Alex took out the elegant sapphire and diamond necklace and earring set, and came behind her to put it on.

The older woman couldn't help, but softly kiss Beth's shoulder as she placed the necklace on her wife.

"You smell delicious."

"Hmm. If you do that more my lord, we won't make it out for the evening."



"Ah, but I can't wait to show New York the most beautiful woman in the world, and she's all mine!"

Beth turned and brushed her hands down the lapels of Alex's dinner jacket.

"So are you going to tell me why I just had to have this beautiful piece of Jewellery?"

"Of course. Come and sit on bed with me."

Once they had settled down Alex took Beth's hand and said. "I'm just carrying on a family tradition. Both my father and grandfather bought their wives a piece of jewellery for every significant event throughout their married lives. That is why I was able to hand such a wonderful collection to you. It's not only for you to enjoy, it's part of our family legacy, that I hope we will be able to pass onto our own children. These pieces of Jewellery, which represent our honeymoon, will be something wonderful to add to the Dalton jewellery collection."

Alex hoped this declaration would open the way to their much needed talk about children.

Beth was quiet and looked thoughtful.

"What's wrong little bit?"

"Would you like children Alex?"

"Of course I would little bit. I would love them with you. Is it something you would like?"

Beth smiled warmly. "It would be a dream. I see how you are with kitten and I would love to see you with our own. I wish it could be ours Alex, really ours."

Alex sighed. "I wish more than anything that I could give you a child with our love."

*I have to make Alex feel better about this.*

"It will be ours in every way that counts darling. Look at how Poni dotes on little kitten? Do you think Poni would love her anymore if she was her own? If we adopt, you will feel the same."

"I know I would. I would love any child, but I have an idea and wondered what you would think. There is another way. "

"What? You could never want me to be with someone...."

"Some else? Never! I would never let anyone else touch you!" Alex said angrily.

"I know. Calm down, I would never. Tell me your plan."

"Well. Poni and Lotty looked into this before they adopted kitten. There is a doctor working in Harley Street, he helps couples who are struggling to conceive a child."

"I don't understand..."

Alex stood and started to pace nervously in front of her. *Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.*

"This doctor... it's very hush, hush. He's been working with childless couples within the aristocracy for some time. It's not a talked about procedure..."

"Alex, take a breath and tell me." The older woman took a breath and stopped pacing.

"You know the biggest worry with landed families is having an heir. As I told you before, you can leave your estate and money to anyone but the title must be inherited by a flesh and blood heir."

"How can a doctor help with that?"

"If the problem lies with the husband, Dr Gerber can take a donation from another man and impregnate the wife with it by simply injecting it within her body. As long as it is done in complete confidence, everyone will think the pregnancy occurred naturally and the child will be seen as a legitimate heir. This procedure is a closely guarded secret. Our situation is a bit different as we couldn't pass the child off as biologically mine, but it could give us a child. Dr. Gerber brought his technique over from Germany; he was forced to leave when the war was starting as he is Jewish. Do you think we should try?"

Beth sat stunned. *I could truly be pregnant? It's astounding!*

"What do you think sweetheart? Would you like to have our baby?"

"I...never dreamed that such a thing could be done. I would love to have a baby. The man who donates doesn't have any say does he?"

Alex sat beside her wife again. "No, not at all, Dr. Gerber uses anonymous donors who are looking to make some money. They will never know us or our baby. "

"Let's discuss it more when we get home, but in principle I would love to have our own baby."

Alex stood and picked up Beth's fur stole. "Wonderful! Now, are we ready to paint the town red?"

Beth picked up her clutch bag and allowed Alex to place the stole over her shoulders.

"Of course. What is this nightclub like?"

The Glass Slipper? It is a little different to The Alley Cat. It attracts a more mixed clientele and has a variety show after dinner. I believe Billy has performed there a few times."

"Oh my! It sounds wonderful. I do miss our friends. I wonder if Billy and Jo have managed to get together yet?"

"I tell you what. Why don't we call home tomorrow? I wanted to check how things were at the office anyway."

"That would be lovely."

Alex held out her arm for her wife and said. "Shall we?"

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Beth giggled at the drag act on stage. She had never seen such a thing and was lapping it up. The couple had enjoyed a lovely dinner and now were thoroughly enjoying the variety show.

Alex sat beaming at Beth, a proprietary arm around the back of her chair. It had not gone unnoticed by the older woman that her wife was the subject of many lustful gazes by the other patrons. Her cold steely stare had been used many a time that evening. The variety show came to an end and Beth said. "Oh darling, that was simply wonderful! I've don't think I've ever laughed so much!"

"I'm so glad little bit. Let me order us some more drinks, you must be thirsty." Alex unsuccessfully tried to signal a waiter.

"Why don't you go up to the bar and order darling?"

Alex looked at her as if she was insane. "Do you think I'd leave you unattended here? Women have been drooling over you since we arrived."

Beth laughed. "Oh I don't think so my lord. I think I would be safe."

*She is still so innocent.* Alex thought.

Stroking her wife's cheek she said quite sternly, "Let me do my job of taking care of you. I see things you don't my love, because you always expect the best from people. This isn't The Alley Cat. I don't know these women and have no idea, if they will respect my boundaries."

"Well I tell you what, my lord the worrier, why don't I trot to the powder my nose and you trot to the bar?"

"And you think my dear that will be any better?" Beth gave Alex a mock glare.

Alex stood and pulled Beth's seat out for her. "Alright! Just don't talk to any strange women! I'm getting soft in my old age!" Alex grumbled.

Beth gave the older woman a peck on the lips and smiled. "You forget my lord; your wife is allowed to boss you about." Beth walked off towards the powder room.

"So I'm learning!"

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Rowena Freeman stood shocked looking at the bar. A ghost from her past had been sitting at one of the tables with a beautiful girl.

*Dalton! It's Alex Dalton! I...can't...* Rowena felt the old cold hatred rise in her throat.

Rowena had years thinking about the moment she would see Alex again, and now it had arrived, suddenly her old training started to kick in.

*Right, the blonde went in the bathroom. Let's find out what Alex's latest bit of skirt can tell me.*

Rowena positioned herself outside of the ladies bathroom and waited.

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Beth retouched her lip stick in the mirror beside a very tall beautiful looking man.

"I love your colour honey!"

"Thank you. You're very kind."

"Oh sweet! You're English! I hope you are enjoying our country?"

The young blonde snapped her clutch bag shut and said. "I couldn't be enjoying it more!"

She turned and walked out the toilets and straight into a passerby. Her bag went tumbling to the floor.

"I'm so sorry! Here let me get your bag."

"Not at all should I have been watching where I was going." Beth looked down at the woman bending to get her bag. Unlike Alex in her dinner suit, she was simply dressed blue suit and striped tie. Her slicked back hair, which had once been black, was now salt and pepper grey.

The woman handed back Beth's bag and held out her hand. "Forgive me. Let me introduce myself. Rowena Matthews, Rowe to my friends, at your service."

Beth smiled warmly and shook Rowena's hand. "Elizabeth Dalton, pleased to meet you."

*Dalton? Her second names Dalton? Must be a distant relative. There is no way on this earth Alex would tie herself down. I need to find out more.* Thought Rowena.

"Let me escort back to your table, to make up for bumping into you in such an ungentle manly manner.

"Oh no please don't trouble yourself..."

The woman put Beth's arm through her own and said, "I insist! Come."

As they approached table, Alex looked up and Beth saw her first a look of recognition and shock pass over her then her face turned to stone.

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*It can't be! Rowe Mathews? The last time I saw her... Alex was back there in her mind.*

*Poni and Tommy struggled to hold Rowe back from Alex.*

*'I'm sorry Rowe, I had no choice! Don't you see that?'*

*Poni and Tommy managed to pull her to the door. 'Come on now, be a good chap and calm down Rowe!' Poni implored the raging woman.*

*Before the two pulled Rowe through the door she fixed Alex with a deadly stare.*

*'Dalton I swear on my life you will pay for this. I will never rest until you feel what I'm feeling now! I hate you!'*

Suddenly back in the present, Alex's eyes zeroed in on Beth's arm through Rowe's. Every hackle raised on the back of her neck raised and she heard herself snarl.

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*Oh goodness. I hope this isn't because I'm with another woman.* Beth knew only too well how jealous and possessive Alex could be.

Hoping to head off any unpleasantness Beth rushed to Alex's side, who immediately pulled her into her side protectively.

"Darling, I bumped into this woman outside the ladies and she offered to escort me back to the table. This is Rowena Mathews." Beth could feel the tension oozing from Alex.

Rowena's face was wreathed in smiles as she said. "Alex Dalton! My my! Who would have thought I'd bump into my old friend here in New York?"

Beth looked up at Alex puzzled. "You two know each other?"

Before Alex could answer Rowe said... "We certainly do! Good to see you my lord."

Rowe offered her hand and Alex had no choice, but to shake. "Rowe? It's been a long time. I see you've met my wife? Lady Dalton."

It was Rowe's turn to be shocked. *She got married? You've certainly changed Dalton. Could it be you actually love someone?*

"My apologies for not addressing you properly, Lady Dalton." Rowe inclined her head towards Beth with a smile.

"How do you two know each other?" asked Beth.

"Oh we're old comrades from our RAF days." replied Rowe.

Beth was confused by Alex's quietness. *What is wrong with her?*

"Really? Well do sit and have a drink with us."

"Thank you." They sat and Rowe ordered a drink from the waiter.

*What does she want? Why did I have to bump into her now, when I'm so happy? I need to get myself together. Can't let Beth see you like this.* Thought Alex.

Rowe knew she had Alex rattled. *Oh this is perfect!*

"Yes we had great times together didn't we? I expect Alex has told you all about the scrapes we got into during the war?"

"Well no, I..."

Alex interrupted and changed the subject. "No. It's not a time I like to dwell on. So what are you doing here in New York Rowe?"

"Oh I live here now. After the war I wandered around. There wasn't anything left for me in Blighty, so I came here and I was enough to be offered a position with the government."

"Really? How exciting! What kind of work did you do? Are there good job opportunities for women in America?"

"Oh I do a bit of this, a bit of that. It gives me freedom to live as I choose."

Alex knew exactly what she meant by that. After her work in the war, she must have been recruited for secret service work.

Rowe lit a cigarette and took a long drag. "We were a jolly group weren't we? Poni, Tommy and..."

Alex cut her off before she could go any further. "Yes, we were."

Rowe smiled knowing she was making Alex squirm. "So how are old Poni and Tommy these days?"

"Oh there fine. We're all great friends. We were together very recently at our wedding. "Beth innocently told Rowe.

"You're just married? You mean this your honeymoon?"

"Yes, our wedding was magical." Beth looked adoringly at Alex.

"Well do forgive me for intruding on your honeymoon. I'll leave you to it then."

Rowe stood and said. "Wonderful to meet you, Lady Dalton and thrilling to see you again my lord, I hope we don't go as long before meeting again. Goodnight."

"Lovely to meet you, Rowe."

After she left, Beth said. "That was good luck to bump into your old RAF chum. She was charming."

"Yes lucky..." Alex said distractedly.

"Did she say anything before you came over to the table?"

"No. She just bumped into me coming out of the ladies, and she picked up my bag and escorted me here. Is everything alright darling?"

"Of course, of course, would you excuse me one minute sweetheart. I just have to ask her something. I won't be long."

"I'll be fine." Alex didn't relish leaving Beth alone, but she had to know.

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Alex walked towards Rowe, who was now sat at the bar. The lord's former comrade had to stifle a smile at the look of uneasiness on Alex's face. "Alex? Can I get you some drinks?"

"No. What's your game Mathews?"

Rowe lifted her glass and calmly took a sip. "Whatever do you mean my lord?"

"You can cut out that rubbish with me Mathews. You know how we parted, and I want to know why you are being so civil?"

Rowe opened her cigarette case and offered one to Alex, who shook her head.

"It's all water under the bridge now. The war was a dark time, but it's over now. I've carved out a new life for myself, and I'm content."

"Whatever may be going on in that head of yours Rowe, forget it. I don't care how much you hate me, but my wife is innocent of all that. I love her and want to make her happy. You should understand that."

Rowe chuckled menacingly. "Oh I do my lord. I know all about loving someone and wanting to do anything to make them happy, I just never thought you would. Usually women only last a few hours with you."

Alex leaned over Rowe menacingly. "Well I do now. Whatever you're thinking, don't. I would do anything to protect Beth, and you know better than anyone how dangerous I am?"

Rowe stubbed out her cigarette in an ashtray. "Oh I know Alex. Believe me I know. But as I say, I've moved on, as have you. So let's just leave it at that. Go back to your wife, before someone steals her away from you."

"Remember what I said!" Alex turned and made her way back to her wife.

Beth watched her partner walk back over to her.

*She looks really tense. There's something really worrying her.*

"Everything alright darling?"

Alex put on her best smile. "Certainly, shall we head back to the suite little bit? I'm a little tired."

"Of course, you do look pale. Perhaps an early night would be best."

As Rowe watched them leave, satisfied with her nights work, she raised her glass and thought.

*I think a trip home to good old blighty may be in order!*



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Beth was awakened by the sound Alex moaning and thrashing around. They had arrived back at their suite earlier and went straight to bed. Alex had been very quiet, turning something over in her head. The older woman's normally voracious appetite for her wife was also muted, wishing to simply cuddle her until sleep claimed them.

"Darling? Darling? Wake up!" Beth shook her partner.

*In Alex's dream, she sat across from her commanding officer. "You have no choice Dalton."*

*"This will destroy Rowe Sir. There must be another way!"*

*"Dalton, the lives of your unit, countless Allied soldiers and, most importantly your country depends on you accepting this assignment. Will you do your duty?"*

*Alex stood up angrily threw the chair to the side and marched to the office door. She grabbed the door handle and said. "I always do my duty."*

Suddenly the dream changed. *Alex allowed herself to be punched in the jaw and wrestled to the ground in the small attic room.*

*Rowe grabbed Alex round the neck and said.*

*"How could you do this to me? We were brothers in arms! I would have died for you and every one of our team."*

*"I know...you...would Rowe. I had...no choice. I...won't fight you..."*

*Rowe squeezed harder as she tried to choke the life out of her former friend and commanding officer.*

*"I will kill you!"*

*Poni and a few other officers burst in. "Rowe no!"...*

"Alex...wake up...please...!" Beth implored, as her partner grabbed Beth's wrists.

"No!" Alex shouted to her dream opponent.

The older woman's grip tightened on her wife's wrists. Beth was then flipped over on her back; she frantically covered her face as Alex pulled her arm back ready to punch. She reached up in desperation and touched the face of her love.

"I love you, my lord."

The older woman's eyes snapped open and she looked down at her wife being held terrified beneath her.

"Beth? What?" Alex looked at her hand cocked back ready to strike.

"Oh, god? Sweetheart? What have I done?" She jumped off of Beth as if she were on fire.

Beth sat up and reached out to Alex. "You were dreaming darling. It's alright. We're fine now."

"I was holding you down. I was going to hit you..."

"No you wouldn't have. You would never..."

Alex turned and dropped to her knees at the side of the bed. "I'm so sorry little bit. Forgive me?"

"Oh course I forgive you. Will you tell me what the dream was about?"

Alex stood and walked over to the window. Even though it was four in the morning, the lights of New York City were still dazzling.

"It's nothing."

Beth got up and joined her partner at the window. "Alex? Look at me."

The older woman turned and hesitantly looked down at her wife.

"You've never had a dream like that with me before, and even discounting that, I can read you like a book my lord. You've been so tense since we met Rowena earlier."

Alex sighed. *I can't lie to her, but I can't tell her the whole truth.*

I used to have dreams all the time. I told you before the war was a dark time. Poni and I weren't just in the RAF, we worked with military intelligence. We were recruited soon after taking commissions in the Air force. They saw us being unique in the fact that we were women, and so were less suspicious but stronger than normal."

"Is that where you know Tommy from?"

"Yes." Alex turned back towards the window, unable to look at her innocent wife and think of the things she had to do in service to her country.

"Rowe too was involved. I was our unit commander. Seeing her tonight stirred some dark memories. The war called for us to do things...things...in defence of our country, that are difficult to remember, and difficult to talk about."

Beth opened up her arms, Alex went into them gladly. "You don't have to say anymore darling, if it hurts you. When you feel like this, just remember that I love you and I always will, no matter what you have done or will do."

Alex squeezed her wife tighter in her arms. "You soothe my soul little bit."

Beth pulled back and looked into the blue eyes that she adored, and repeated the words that Alex had said to her at the club earlier. "It's my job. Allow me to do it." Beth took her partners hand and pulled her back to bed, where she tenderly showed her how much she loved her and did indeed soothe Alex's soul.

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The next morning Beth wakened to find Alex gone from the bed. She worried that, after last night, Alex was upset again.

She just started to get up when fully dressed and beaming Lord Dalton came through the door with a breakfast tray in her hands.

"Good morning little bit!" Alex said very cheerily.

"You brought breakfast?"

"Yes I ordered it earlier. Thought you would like to have it in bed this morning. Oh! I almost forgot. Excuse me one minute." Alex put the tray down on her wife's lap and went out the bedroom door. She returned seconds later with a large bouquet of flowers.

"For the most wonderful wife in all the world!"

Beth inhaled the scent and laid them down on the other side of the bed. "They are wonderful! You are very happy this morning darling?"

Alex sat on the bed and kissed her hand. "Well, I am happy. I'm the luckiest Lord to have you as my wife. I wanted to apologise again for last night, and thank you for making me feel so much better. I swear to you it will never happen again."

Beth squeezed her partner's hand. "You don't need to apologise my darling, and I will comfort you whenever you need me. I am your wife, and that's what I do."

"Thank you, sweetheart. Now eat up! We've a lot more to do today. I told Laura you would call for her when you were ready to dress."

Beth sipped her tea and smiled. *She is transformed from last night. Back to her old self! I pray I will always have this effect on her.*

"I thought when you were finished eating; we might telephone home to the Woodward's. How would you like that?"

"Oh, I would love that! I miss them all. We must visit the toy shop you were telling me about and get Kitten some things to take back." Beth said excitedly.

Sometime later, Alex watched her wife giggle and laugh on the telephone with Lotty.

Alex had spoken with Poni first, and had been assured the Foundation was running like clockwork.

They had also discovered that their friends Jo and Billy had finally come together. In fact, the Woodward's had them to dinner the previous evening.

Alex sniggered at the thought of bad boy Billy, finally tamed, as she had been.

Before handing over the telephone to Beth, Alex had extracted a promise that the Woodward's, would come to Dencotte for a few days, after they had returned from honeymoon. Poni had promised to invite Billy and Jo as well.

Alex watched Beth whisper into the receiver, telling Lotty some secret, or other. She guessed it may be something steamy as Beth went bright red when Alex raised a questioning eyebrow towards her wife.

*You were right Poni old friend. Married life is wonderful!* Alex thought.

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Oh my! I forgot how truly beautiful it is! said Beth, as they drove up the road towards Dencotte House.

They had returned home from New York and had been met by Alfie, who drove them back home.

"Yes, no matter how many times I leave it, it always takes my breath away when I return home, and now I'm returning with my wife."

Beth gazed longingly at the beautiful house. *Home... this is my home now.* Beth's heart rate picked up as they stopped in front of the entrance. The staff had gathered, lined up to meet them.

Alex took Beth's hand.

"Are you ready to start your new life my lady?"

"As long as it's by your side my lord."

Foster and Mrs Mckluskey stood at the head of the welcoming party. A footman walked forward to open the doors for the newlyweds and another started to help with the luggage.

They watched as Alex helped Beth out of the Rolls Royce with a look of utter adoration on her face.

"Well Mrs Mcklusey our Alex has finally settled down and grown up to be a fine master."

Mrs Mcluskey smiled warmly. "Yes Mr Foster, and brought us home the lady of Dencotte house, at last..."

The end.

I would be delighted to hear your comments about this story at [jennyframe91@yahoo.com](mailto:jennyframe91@yahoo.com)

Also please take a look at my website where you can listen to the soundtrack to 'The Lady of Dencotte House' and find information on my future stories. [www.jennys-storybook.com](http://www.jennys-storybook.com)